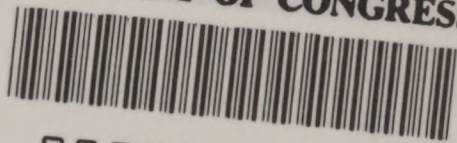


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The Marriage of Gerard

by

André Theuriet

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1891

THE MARRIAGE OF GERARD



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...THE...

MARRIAGE^{OF} GERARD

By André Theuriet

Author of "Queen of the Woods," etc.

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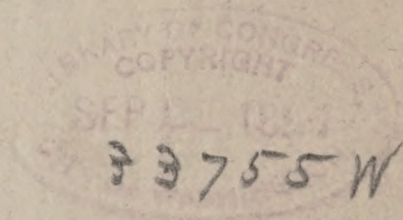
MARY LINSAY WATKINS



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THE MARRIAGE OF GERARD

I

What soothing voices have the bells that still sound the curfew in certain little provincial towns! That familiar music sweetly closes the day of labor, and lulls the children to sleep in their little osier beds more gently than a nursery song. There is something so friendly and comforting in the full tones—something so grand and peaceful. The curfew of Juvigny-en-Barrios has such accents. Its mellow voice is heard every evening at eight o'clock in winter, at nine o'clock in summer, from the top of the massive clock-tower which is the only ornament left, in the mural crown of the old town, by Louis XIV., that great destroyer of Lorraine fortresses.

One beautiful Sunday in July, 186—, the last vibrations of the bell faded away along

the vineyards where the houses of Juvigny, scattered here and there on the verdant hills sloping toward the river Ornain, have the appearance of a straggling flock of white sheep descending to a watering-place.

In a garden that bloomed behind an ancient house of the upper town, a young man leaning on a wall of the terrace, contemplated the steep declivity of the gorge of Palval lying between two vineyards already veiled in the twilight. The first stars had opened their diamond eyes above the ridge of woody hills that bordered the horizon, and far away in the direction of the woods, the rumbling of wheels resounded along the stony road.

Breaking the silence that succeeded the musical strokes of the bell, the east wind bore in joyous breaths the music of a *fete Champetre* hidden from view under the trees of a neighboring grove. The young man lifted his head and drew a long breath of the sonorous air, as if he wished to drink in the melodious sounds borne to him on the breeze.

"Monsieur Gerard," suddenly cries behind him the nasal voice of the old servant of the house; "M. de Seigneulles has already gone to bed; Baptiste and I are about to go also. Isn't it time for you to come in?"

"Directly, Manette."

The old woman, after double locking the door that led into the vineyard, returned to her young master.

"Good night then," she said; "when you come in do not forget to close the vestibule; your father does not like to sleep with open doors."

"Yes, yes," responded the young man impatiently; "good night."

Gerard de Seigneulles was a youth of twenty-three. His figure was slender but well-built; his complexion fair, and his eyes deep blue, that contrasted strangely with his black hair and brown mustache.

His physiognomy was emotional; passion seemed concealed and restrained by a singular timidity; this *melange* giving to his person an appearance of reserve that people generally mistook for coldness and indifference. His father, a Chevalier de Saint-Louis and ancient garde-du-corps under the Restoration, was married very late in life, and before the lapse of many years was a widower.

Gerard, his only son, had been reared with old-fashioned severity. An obstinate and ardent Legitimist, with an uncultured intellect but with a good heart and a proverbial honesty, the *Chev-*

alier, as he was called at Juvigny, had always upheld the principle that a son should obey his parents passively until he became of age, and with him majority was not reached until the age of twenty-five, in accordance with the old law.

When Gerard was twelve years old, he was sent to a Jesuit college at Metz. He ever remembered with a shudder his vacations whenever he returned home with bad marks.

He would often make the tour of the whole town, five or six times, before he dared encounter the inevitable paternal reprimand, so terrible was the noisy wrath of M. de Seigneulles. Soon after his graduation, he took a course of law at Nancy, but there, as elsewhere, the austere Chevalier took good care not to loosen the reins. He put his son to board with an old relative, where, to gain his apartment, he had to pass through the chamber of that respectable dowager, thus obliging him to return at an early hour, and rendering impossible any nocturnal emancipation. Under such surveillance, one can well understand why the young man did not long pursue the study of law. After passing with difficulty his four examinations and winning his diploma, he was en route to Juvigny before the expiration of a month.

Notwithstanding this cloisteral education, Gerard was worldly to the marrow in his bones, and his artificial virtues pressed heavily upon him.

Instinct and temperament scarcely ever change, and young Seigneulles was soon seized with a violent desire for the pleasures of the world. He had warm blood and an inquisitive mind; and as, up to that time, the sugar-plums of life had been kept beyond his reach, he promised to crunch them with avidity the day he would have them in his grasp.

Unluckily, from the very first day of his return, he had to fight against his natural impulses. Although Juvigny was the chief town of the Department, pleasures did not abound there, and the life one led at the house of M. de Seigneulles was anything but cheerful for a lively youth of twenty-three.

The Chevalier never saw anyone but the Curé of the parish and two or three venerable gentlemen of his own age. Although he gave his son a little more liberty than formerly, he did not allow him much means to profit by it; so that, among the young people of Juvigny, whose manners and language were unlike his own, Gerard found himself awkward and unnatural.

How he hated such an existence! Impatient aspirations swelled his breast and mounted to his lips. Ardent by nature, his head full of desires, his body teeming with the sap of adolescence, he often said to himself that every moment of that miserable life was so much stolen from his youth; and almost as restless in his solitude as a squirrel in its cage, he often yawned with ennui and lassitude.

One evening a young girl named Reine Lecomte, a seamstress whom Manette sometimes employed by the day, surprised him in just such a state of mind.

Coquettish and wanton, as are all the grisettes of Juvigny, she looked at him out of the corner of her eye as he passed her, walking with bowed head and folded arms in the paternal garden.

"Monsieur Gerard," she said suddenly, looking up from her work, "you have the air of being greatly bored."

"That is true," he responded, blushing, yet lingering to converse with her, "for I find the days long and tiresome."

"It is because you do not know how to amuse yourself. Why not go to the ball at the Willows to-morrow night?"

"Go to a ball?" gasped Gerard, trembling lest his father should hear him.

"Yes, like the other young gentlemen. They think you are too proud, and scorn to go to our working folks' balls."

"They are mistaken," he replied; "I do not go because I am not acquainted with any one."

"Bah! you will have plenty of partners if you come to-morrow night. I will promise you a quadrille myself."

While chatting with him, little Reine gathered up the linen from the bench upon which she sat, and folded it neatly. The rays of the setting sun crept through the foliage of the trees and shone upon her laughing, dimpled face, revealing a pair of bright black eyes, a retroussé nose, and glittering white teeth.

After awhile she went away, smiling upon the young man in a way to set him to dreaming.

The next morning, he began to ponder upon the idea of a flight to the Ball of the Willows, weighing in the balance the attraction of the forbidden fruit and the risk of his father's anger.

This then explained why the joyous sounds of music in the distance caused him, that evening, so singular an emotion.

A Parisian, accustomed to spending his youth

in revelry and in a continual whirl of pleasure, would have smiled at the agitation caused by the thought of a workman's ball; but, for Gerard, reared like a girl and having so seldom tasted the grapes of enjoyment, this ball had the mysterious seduction of a sin committed for the first time. To him, the public garden of the Willows was a forbidden realm, full of new and intoxicating odors.

A sudden burst of music from the orchestra triumphed over his last hesitation; he determined to attend the ball. It was folly to think of going through the vineyard door, for Manette had taken away the keys, so Gerard climbed over the wall of the terrace, and leaping lightly upon the orchard grass, he glided cautiously through the vines. A quarter of an hour afterward he was trudging along under the great plane-trees of the avenue that bordered an arm of the Or-nain, which was now enveloped in darkness. At the extreme end of the avenue, at the entrance to the public garden, colored lanterns were suspended from the branches of the trees, and scattered here and there in the foliage, resembling glow-worms. When the music ceased, one could hear only the rippling of the water under the trees.

Arriving at a rustic bridge which led to the Willows, Gerard, breathless and panting, felt his courage diminishing. He did not know how to present himself at the ball, and he lingered undecided on the bank of the river. The orchestra played a waltz; through the hedges he could see the couples turning under the garlands and wreaths of flowers, in a circle full of luminous dust. Merry bursts of laughter mingled with the soft notes of the flute and the shrill tones of the violin: and the air was full of intoxicating odors of reseda and clematis. Gerard crossed the bridge and sheltered behind the fir trees and obscure hedges; he walked along, shame-faced, and at length he stood behind the row of matrons attired in their Sunday clothes, and the crowd of curious burghers, who were spectators of the ball in the open air.

His eyes were dazzled, coming so suddenly from the deep shadow, and it was with difficulty that he distinguished among the dancers the radiant face of little Reine. She was arrayed in a costume of flowered muslin, and on her head was a tiny bonnet of red roses and bright ribbons that fluttered in the breeze. She was dancing with a great robust youth with a bushy blonde beard and a ruddy countenance who waltzed admirably,

and who seemed to be the leading man at the dance. He wore a broad-brimmed felt hat; a long coat of black velvet; a scarlet cravat, and pantaloons of white cassimere, ornamented with a black stripe; a toilet at once careless and loud, contrasting greatly with the correct coats and high hats of the other young men.

The grace and suppleness of the waltzer of the velvet coat seemed to excite the unbounded admiration of the lookers-on.

"See," said one old gossip, "little Reine loves good dancers, for she has not left M. Laheyrd this evening."

"She is avenging herself on the brother, for the turn the sister has played her," said an ill-favored girl, a tapestry-maker. "Mademoiselle Laheyrd has stolen from Reine her lover."

"What! that little Finoël! has he taken it into his head to marry the Parisian?"

"He is always tied to her petticoats, and she drags him along like her shadow," replied the tapestry-maker.

The waltz being finished, Gerard went in with beating heart in search of little Reine. Observing that the young men wore gloves when they danced, he felt in his pockets and found a pair of black ones.

They did not go to much trouble or expense to keep up with the fashions at the house of M. de Seigneulles, and black was there the color *a la mode*. While Gerard was sadly staring at this livery of mourning, and asking himself if he had not better dance with bare hands, he heard the signal for the quadrille, and found himself suddenly lace to face with Reine Lecomte.

"So you are here!" she cried gayly. "You have kept your word; give me your arm."

Gerard hastily thrust his fingers into the said black gloves, and with little Reine hanging on his arm they walked triumphantly to their place in the most brilliantly lighted part of the ball-room. She was not sorry to show to them all that she had for a partner a very handsome young man, and heir to one of the best families of Juvigny. Gerard, seeing that all eyes were upon him, began to lose his courage. Several of the dancers who knew him and did not like him, looked at him askance and sneered among themselves. Gerard felt ill at ease, and began to regret his escapade, when the orchestra struck up a prelude.

At that moment the jolly young man with the velvet coat approached little Reine and said in a tone half-bantering, half in earnest:

"What, queen of my heart! Have you broken your promise and bestowed your favors on a stranger?"

"Yes," she responded airily; "M. de Seigneulles is here for the first time and we must encourage beginners."

"I know that you love to give instructions," replied the young man with a burst of laughter, and lifting his hat, "my compliments, monsieur."

Gerard bit his lips and blushed.

"Shut up, impertinence," cried Reine, and turning toward her partner she asked him if he had a *vis-a-vis*. On his replying in the negative she turned again to the young man with the blonde beard.

"Well then, *mauvais sujet*, go quickly, get a partner and be our *vis-a-vis*."

"At your command, Duchess!"

He bowed profoundly, then whirling on his heel he was soon back again with a young girl.

The quadrille began; Gerard did not talk much to Reine, for he was entirely ignorant of the language in which to speak to a *grisette*; so the conversation lagged, and the son of M. de Seigneulles began to think that a ball was far from possessing the charms of which he had dreamed.

He trembled lest he should commit some awk-



wardness in dancing, but fortunately the quadrille was executed with so little ceremony that a child would have been at ease. But the *cavalier seul* was really a trial to him; he knew that all eyes were upon him, so he advanced timidly, not knowing what to do with his arms, and hardly daring to raise his eyes. He realized his own inferiority when he saw the accomplishments of his *vis-a-vis* in the velvet coat.

He led out with a number of fancy steps, during which he waved his arms in the air above his head like the wings of a gigantic insect, then suddenly stopped short, balanced himself lightly and gravely before Gerard, made a grotesque bow, and kissing his fingers to the two dancers he took their hands and terminated it all in a merry rondeau.

"Who is this young man?" demanded Gerard of Reine.

"Why he is your neighbor, the son of the Inspector of the Academy. Ah! I wager that you are better acquainted with his sister, the beautiful Helen Laheyward."

"No, for I have just arrived from Nancy and I am acquainted with no one."

"You will know her soon enough," replied little Reine with ill-concealed malice as she continued

to speak of her. "Dieu! if the rest of us were allowed to do one-half that is permitted that Parisian, there would not be enough stones to throw at us!"

"Truly; and is she so beautiful?"

"That depends on one's taste," responded Reine with disdain; "there are people who rave over her big eyes that look as if they wished to devour the world, and her lovely curls hanging down her back. As for me, I wouldn't go out of my way to see her; but men are so stupid."

The final galop cut short this conversation, and Gerard who had regained a little of his courage placed his arm about the young girl and whirled around like the others in the ball-room. He greatly liked to dance in this fashion, and proud of having gotten along so well he was thinking of starting out again, when an exclamation from a person on the bench, to which he had conducted Reine, made him turn on his heel. It was a neighbor who came to tell the young girl that the five black fingers of Gerard's glove were imprinted on her white bodice. "Ah! M. de Seigneulles, you are a nice fellow!" cried the grisette. "See how you have spoiled my dress!"

Poor Gerard, stupefied and abashed, wished himself a hundred miles away. They all formed

a circle around him and began to laugh maliciously as he blushed and stammered out an apology.

"Ma foi!" cried a bantering voice behind him, "since M. de Seigneulles permits his son to attend a ball he should at least be willing to buy him a pair of yellow gloves!"

"Bah!" said another who wished to be witty, "the aristocracy of the upper town is all alike; they keep their wardrobes as well as their hopes in mourning."

Gerard lost patience; turning toward the speaker he seized him by the coat-collar and shook him violently.

"Sir!" he cried, "I believe that you wish to insult me!"

In an instant he was surrounded by a crowd of shop-keepers, who began to bully him. "Out with him!" they cried; "this is one of the *nobility* who imagine they can be masters at our balls."

"Hold, messieurs!" exclaimed a ringing voice; "is this the way you show your hospitality?"

With two blows from his massive shoulders, M. Laheyraud made way through the crowd and quickly placed himself by the side of Gerard. With his hands squarely upon his hips, he defied the assailants.

"This is a great noise," he continued, "to **make** about a soiled dress. Monsieur will be glad to offer a new one to Mlle. Reine; that is his affair. But is this a reason for you to conduct yourselves like dogs that bark at strangers passing through the town? I find you perfectly absurd, and I tell you this much that the first one who takes a step toward my young friend will first gain an intimate acquaintance with my two fists. A word to the wise!"

The assailants looked at him dubiously, mentally contemplating the strength of arm of M. Laheyward, and after some low grumbling, they dispersed at the first sounds of the orchestra that announced a new quadrille.

Gerard thanked warmly his defender, who shrugged his shoulders, and led his protégé aside to an unfrequented walk.

"You are then really at the ball of the Wil-lows for the first time?" he demanded; and receiving an answer in the affirmative, he continued:

"One can see that you still have to acquire the *sailor's foot*, but you will overcome that with a little practice."

Gerard replied that this unfortunate affair had disgusted him with public balls for some time to

come; and he was about to take leave of his new friend.

"Wait a moment," cried M. Laheyrd, "I will not leave you; the avenue is obscure and deserted; these idiots might there be able to take their revenge."

"If I am not mistaken," said Gerard, "we are neighbors. My name is Gerard de Seignéulles, and I believe it is to the son of the Inspector, M. Laheyrd, to whom I have the pleasure of speaking."

"Yes," responded his companion, complacently stroking his blonde beard, "Marius Laheyrd, student at the Paris University and the editor of *L'Aurore Boréale*, a journal of the new school; you have often read therein, no doubt, verses of my own composition."

"Pardon me," said Gerard politely, "I must confess that I have never seen the journal, but I will procure it."

"I sign myself *Mario*," continued M. Laheyrd, "out of respect to the good man."

"What good man?" interrupted Gerard, not comprehending him.

"The good man Laheyrd, my father," replied the poet carelessly. "He has a horror of verses and he wishes to prevent my writing under the

pretext that my *Poemes Orgiaques* compromise his dignity as a member of the University—but I give him as good as he sends."

"Ah!" murmured young Seigneulles, wondering at the want of respect with which his new acquaintance treated parental authority; but wishing to appear amiable, he added:

"I greatly love poetry myself; I admire Lamartine."

"Lamartine! an old stuffed nightingale!" said Marius irreverently.

"But," urged Gerard, "there is *Jocelyn*—"

"*Jocelyn*! that's older than the moon!" exclaimed M. Laheyraud mercilessly. Then with much spirit he expounded to his companion the whole of a *théorie poétique*, in which a combination of curious, sonorous words took the place of emotion and depth of thought.

"You see," he continued with a superb air, "to awaken the inspiration that makes poems blossom like dandelions in a meadow, it is only necessary, for us who 'chisel words as statues,' to light the lamps; then for the incomparable combat."

Gerard listened in amazement. To join example to precept, Marius, as they walked along the silent streets, recited sonnets in which he

spoke of *barren ages, frightful obscurities, and savage homesickness*; the setting sun was compared to a drunkard beclouded with wine, and the stars to gold-fish swimming in an azure jar. After declaiming for nearly an hour, the poet stopped to knock the ashes from his pipe and to relight it.

By the light of the match Gerard contemplated his sensual, jovial features, and wondered how such funereal poetry could emanate from such a Rabelaisian head.

"I am as dry as the sands of Sahara," exclaimed M. Laheyraud, smacking his lips; "it is lamentable that the cafés be all closed at this hour."

Then he began to vaunt the virtues of the foaming beer; and passing from æsthetics to gastronomy, he soared aloft in a heroic style in praise of the bountiful dinner-parties they gave at Juvigny. The character of Marius was such a mixture of bizarre affectation, boyish blackguardism, and jovial good-fellowship, that Gerard could not determine whether he was a fool or a hoaxer. In a short time they reached the Rue du Tribel, where they both lived; Marius drew from his pocket an enormous pass-key.

"This," he said, "is the dainty little key that

opens the paternal mansion; but I will first conduct you to your door."

"I have no key," stammered Gerard in confusion, "and I do not care to awaken my father."

He then recounted to Marius how he had jumped over the wall of the garden. Marius burst out laughing.

"Ah!" cried he, holding his sides, "the black gloves, your timid dancing, and your behavior with little Reine are all explained. Go; you are a virtuous young man, and I hope we will meet again. Climb your wall! Good night!"

He entered the house whistling. As to Gerard, turning the corner of the street, he climbed through the vineyard and began the arduous task of scaling the terrace. Thanks to the old moss-grown hedge which made a natural ladder, he reached the top of the wall in safety, when a merry voice startled him.

"Bravo, bravo!" and lifting his head, he perceived the poet smoking, perched upon the limb of a tree in the adjoining garden.

The most difficult part was accomplished but with great precaution. Gerard crept to the vestibule and mounted the stairway on the tips of his toes. When he reached the landing opposite his father's room, he believed himself safe, but,

for some misfortune, he stumbled against something in the darkness. Instantly the chamber door opened, and the Chevalier de Seigneulles appeared, enveloped in a flannel gown with a candle-stick in his hand.

"By the Pope's shoe!" he cried, "do you take my house for a furnished hotel! I had no idea that my doors were left open after ten o'clock. You ought to know—" and as Gerard tried to excuse himself, he continued with great severity:

"Enough; go to bed! Present yourself to me to-morrow to make your apologies!"

II

On the morrow, shaving day, the Chevalier de Seigneulles was installed in a great leather chair in the middle of his kitchen, between his servant, Manette, and his barber, Magdelinet.

Manette was lighting a taper to warm the water for the soap, and the jet of flame cast its bright reflection on the iron jack-spit, the row of copper pans, and the high dresser, laden with plates and dishes. A ray of sunlight crept through the curtain of red cottonade, casting a beautiful shade of rose on the white hair of M. de Seigneulles and upon the sleek and cunning face of Magdelinet who was engaged in sharpening his razor on a leather strap.

The barber was a great talker, obsequious and insinuating; as spiteful as a wasp, but as timid as a hare. He was the first to learn the scandals at Juvigny, and he had the art of seasoning them with wicked comments and of giving to them a

savor agreeable to the taste of his customers.

M. de Seigneulles was the only one who received with a bad grace these stories of the gossiping barber, who secretly nursed a grudge against him.

On arising that morning, Magdelinet had heard the adventure of the Willows' ball, and he wished to regale the Chevalier with it in order to wound his pride. His tongue itched to begin it, but he restrained himself, fearing the wrath of his austere customer, and while he whetted his razor he sought for a way in which to gratify his malice without being expelled from M. de Seigneulles' presence. The ancient *garde-du-corps* seemed less disposed than usual to engage in conversation with the hair-dresser.

He had arisen in an ill humor; his emaciated form was rigid; his gray eyes were fixed straight in front of him; his eyebrows had the air of two circumflex accents; and his nose, always like an eagle's beak, was more pinched than usual this morning. He set his teeth and remained insensible even to the gambolings of his two favorite cats that frolicked in vain between his long, thin legs, mewling softly.

"Where is my son?" he demanded brusquely.

Manette replied that M. Gerard had gone to

the country early that morning, not knowing whether he would return before noon, leaving word that they must not wait dinner for him. M. de Seigneulles growled with an air of discontentment.

"M. Gerard," graciously remarked Magdelinet, "is a handsome youth, and promises to become a good dancer."

"What do you know about it?" said M. de Seigneulles dryly.

"Oh! I only know from hearsay!"

"What are you driving at with your *hearsay*?—My son never put his foot into a ball-room in his life, and I do not know that he will ever dance at a public place."

Magdelinet coughed discreetly and busied himself in frothing the soap in the china shaving-cup.

"Does M. de Seigneulles know M. Marius Laheyrd?"

"What! that buffoon who blows a horn and keeps me from sleeping? Dieu! No! and I have no wish to become acquainted with him."

"M. Laheyrd is also a beautiful dancer and always has a merry word for everybody."

M. de Seigneulles made a gesture of impatience and Magdelinet began to rub the lather over his



cheeks and chin. When the old Chevalier, with his face plastered over with that unctuous coating of foam was in no condition to talk, being entirely at the mercy of the barber, at that critical moment, Magdelinet continued perfidiously:

"The adventure of M. Laheyward at the ball of the Willows created quite a sensation. You see, sir, he took sides against five or six quarrelsome fellows who wished to pick a fuss with a young gentleman who was not familiar with the customs, having come to the ball for the first time. Don't you understand? Sought to molest an unoffending youth under the pretext that he belonged to the aristocracy, and that his father still mourned for Charles X.—"

He was violently interrupted by the old Chevalier who threw up his arms as if in pain.

"His name!" he cried through the flakes of foam. "It is Gerard, is it not? Sangerbleu! Out with your mysteries, and tell me all without evasion."

"Heaven defend me!" exclaimed the terrified barber, "I was not there. They have, it is true, spoken to me vaguely of M. Gerard, but I affirm nothing. Be still, M. de Seigneulles, or my razor will make a gash."

"Tell me all," said the Chevalier with a scowl.

The malicious barber did not wait to be urged. Without heeding the grimaces of Manette who shook her finger behind the arm-chair, he unraveled his skein to the last thread, describing the quadrille and the galop danced by Gerard; his admiration for little Reine; the episode of the black gloves, and finally, the triumphant interference of Marius Laheyward. M. de Seigneulles listened patiently without interrupting him, but the muscles of his face were distended, his expression was very sorrowful and in his eyes was a cold stare. He seemed so mortified that the barber was afraid that he had gone too far, and thinking to mend matters he added afterward that Reine was quite a pretty girl, and that more than one of the fellows at the ball wished he had been in Gerard's place.

"Enough!" growled the austere Chevalier. "Do you believe my son capable of associating with this seamstress?"

"And if he should," answered the barber smiling, "provided a boy brings home his head on his shoulders one need not be disturbed."

"But he may compromise this young girl," cried M. de Seigneulles with horror depicted on his countenance.

"Bah! Reine is a cunning little creature. That

is her lookout; moreover, should she make a false step with M. Gerard it would be of no consequence."

"Sir! Magdelinet!" cried the Chevalier, his voice full of contempt. "With you tradesmen in the lower town such morality may pass, but with me, when one breaks a pane of glass one has to pay for it. The Seigneulleses have always lived above reproach and my son shall respect this young girl. I do not want him to expose himself to any scandalous intrigue, or worse than that."

"Manette," he added, arising haughtily, and wiping his chin, "tell Baptiste to saddle Bruno."

M. de Seigneulles then went out without deigning to notice Magdelinet further, and the barber folded up his shaving apparatus and went away, followed by the reproaches of Manette.

When Bruno was saddled, the Chevalier, who had arrayed himself in his long brown riding coat and his broad-brimmed hat, descended to the courtyard, mounted his old horse and started forth on his daily ride. Every morning, after attending early mass, he completed his toilet and rode around the environs of the town for two hours. Sitting straight upon his saddle, never losing a hair-breadth of his stature, he wended his way

slowly through the streets of Juvigny. When he passed before the plaster images of the Virgin that ornamented the cottages of the vine-dresser and which they decorate with black grapes on Assumption day, he never failed to stop Bruno and to raise his hat devoutly.

This morning he was so absorbed in serious recreations that he took no notice of the draped facades of the vineyards, nor of the Notre-Dames in plaster. His head was lowered and he was thinking painfully of the words of Magdelinet.

"So," thought he, "Gerard has not escaped the contagion! I have watched over him in vain. I have endeavored to rear him religiously, and to keep him aloof from an impious and libertine world, but I have effected nothing! Wicked world!" he continued, whipping up Bruno, who, profiting by the distraction of his master was nibbling twigs from the hedges. "Epoch without principles or reverence! Leprosy has vitiated souls nourished upon the most holy doctrines. To go and compromise himself at a ball with grisettes! Has Gerard no shame? It is a terrible thing to have sons. As soon as they are twenty they are like those wines that begin to bubble as soon as the vine is in blossom, and break the

bottles if they are not looked after. Sangrebleu! Are the hearts of all young people alike!"

Yes, they are all alike, and if M. de Seigneulles, sauntering along the path overhung with linden trees, had only looked around him he would have seen that all creation was a prey to the same troubles and the same temptations. Under the sweet-scented foliage of the lindens brilliant butterflies, with wings of mother of pearl, floated in the sunlight, two and two—the gorgeous dragon-flies glittered, in couples, on the stalks of the bulrushes, and on the other side of the hedge, the reapers were kissing the girls without shame in the open daylight.

The Chevalier may not have been impressed with all these things, but he lashed Bruno with a vigorous blow of his whip and the steed struck a brisk trot, not stopping to breathe till he had reached the uplands of Savonnière. The sun, already high in the heavens, spread a carpet of gold over the rustic landscape. Above the deep shadows of the gorge of Savonnière a light fog still hung, but on the uplands of the opposite hills all was joyous and dazzlingly bright. Between the clumps of trees, though a transparent veil of smoke, one could see the houses of Juvigny nestling on the hillsides. The deep verd-

ure of the garden contrasted with the red roofs; the window panes scintillated, and above the flying vapors the spire of Saint-Etienne, and the great tower of the clock, rose luminously against the immaculate blue of the heavens. Below the town were vineyards, and vineyards, making a landscape of verdant, undulating knolls, reaching almost to the great forest of Argonne which like a distant blue-line marked the extreme limit of the horizon.

Across the golden sunshine, through the limpid air, the serene voices of the bells of Juvigny floated in a sonorous chorus.

The Chevalier loosened the reins and permitted Bruno to walk lazily along, as he drank in with a certain voluptuousness the harmony of the scene. It was his own country; from his infancy he had breathed its invigorating air and he admired it with patriotic pride. The misty moors; the vineyards resounding with the shrill pipings of the grasshopper; the moss-covered ancient houses of the upper town; the song of the very bells that had rung at his baptism; all recalled to him, without a doubt, the time of his own youth when he had a tender heart and was quick to yield to temptation. He felt softened, as if he had imbibed a refreshing dew, and for a moment

the heart of the austere old man was stirred with sentiments of humanity.

"Ah well!" he sighed as he gave the spur to Bruno, "the boy must marry. After all it is but a question of time."

Gerard's marriage! this was the subject of his thoughts as he partook of his midday repast. The young man fearing a sudden outburst of paternal wrath had not appeared.

M. de Seigneulles dispatched his dinner and descended to the lower town as far as the house of an old lady, the widow of one of his friends, Madame de Travanette, by name.

The widow's house, situated in a part of Juvigny called the *bourg*, was famous in the country for its beautiful stairway of hammered iron, its facade of the sixteenth century, and the elegant stone fountains in its garden. This house was a rendezvous for the few that were left of the local, ancient nobility. Every day, at three o'clock, these old friends assembled there to play backgammon.

This afternoon, when M. de Seigneulles entered the antique salon which was wainscoted with oak and hung with Flanders tapestry, he observed Madam de Travanette seated in her arm-chair, arrayed in a black silk, her form upright and vig-

orous, in spite of her seventy years, under a front of false black hair. She was knitting industriously a woolen stocking.

Leaning upon the arm of her chair was the Abbé Valland, Curé of Saint-Etienne, his eyes twinkling merrily as he listened to the confidences of the old dame. He was a fat little man with short, plump hands, and thick lips that were cleft in the middle like a double cherry; and when he laughed he displayed rows of little square white teeth. That red cherry mouth; that ruddy retroussé nose, those sharp black eyes, twinkling under a tuft of thick gray hair, all said very plainly, that the Curé was a jolly companion, merry and good-natured, with unctuous manners and a delightful flow of spirits.

On the arrival of M. de Seigneulles the Abbé Valland rose and made an elegant bow, an ecclesiastical bow that was full of reverence. At first they spoke of indifferent matters, then the name of Gerard was pronounced.

"How is he?" demanded Madame de Travanette, "and is it true that you wish to make a magistrate of him?"

"No," answered the Chevalier; "not until the true government be re-established, shall Gerard take an oath he cannot observe. I am keeping

my son for the day when our King shall return, and may it not be long!"

"Amen!" sighed Madame de Travanette, "and may God hear you, but I fear that we will never see that day. Kings in exile do wrong; in the hearts of their subjects, they are only like those old friends who wish to renew a correspondence interrupted for many years; when the pen is picked up they perceive there is nothing more in common between them, and, hence, nothing to say."

The Abbé, who abhorred politics, brushed absent-mindedly the specks of dust from the sleeves of his cassock.

"In the meantime," continued Madame de Travanette, "what do you intend to do with Gerard?"

"I wish him to marry."

"So soon as this?"

"It is not *too* soon," replied the Chevalier. He then recounted the story of Gerard's escapade at the ball of the Willows, while the Abbé smiled with the knowing air of one already acquainted with the facts. When M. de Seignuelles pronounced the name of Marius Layherard, Madame de Travanette threw up her hands in horror.

"Ah!" she cried; "what a family are those Layherards! No one ever heard of such a disordered household. The children go with holes in their stockings, and nobody in the house ever touches a needle. I have nothing to say against the father; he is a poor unfortunate man, but the mother, what a fool! One cannot comprehend how she had even sufficient tact to secure a husband in a city where she led such a stormy youth. Everyone knows that when she married M. Laheyrd there were ugly rumors about her. She made me a visit but I have never returned it, and I hope she will stay at home in the future."

"Her eldest daughter is a girl of talent," said the Abbé.

"Poor child, I can hardly blame her, she has been so badly reared. Is it true, Abbé, that she promenades alone with an humble employé of the Prefecture and that she designs nude figures?"

Abbé Valland did not hesitate to repel those unpalatable suspicions.

"I assure you, madame, that people say more than is the truth."

"Oh! you, M. Valland, you always defend them! You have a weakness for scabby sheep."

"Well, madame," gently responded the Abbé,

"is this not truly evangelical charity? Besides, Madame Laheyraud is a distant relative of mine. Helene is my god-daughter and she sings in the choir with great zeal and fervor."

"But no one visits them," continued Madame de Travanette with obstinacy.

"Pardon me; Madame Grandfief, haughty as she is, does not hesitate to receive Mlle. Laheyraud."

"She gives drawing-lessons to her daughter Georgette. Besides, Madame Grandfief is a fine example!"

"Speaking of Madame Grandfief," interrupted M. de Seigneulles, "is she not the wife of the Iron-master of Salvanches? Did you say she had a daughter?"

"Yes," replied Madame de Travanette, "and since you are in search of a wife for your son Gerard, here is your chance."

The Chevalier shrugged his shoulders.

Madame de Travanette, who was a great match-maker, hastened to pronounce a warm eulogy on Georgette Grandfief.

"She is eighteen years old; pretty, well-mannered; two hundred thousand francs for her dowry; in a word, she is an excellent match."

M. de Seigneulles would have preferred a fam-

ily less *bourgeoise*, but the old lady explained to him that at Juvigny the daughters of the nobility were very poor and very pretentious, and she ended by offering to act as intermediary.

The Chevelier remained thoughtful. Before returning home, he would have liked to see the mother and daughter and to judge for himself.

"Listen," said the Abbé, rising to depart. "I am going to propose something not altogether canonical, but heaven will pardon me on account of the purity of my motives. To-morrow afternoon, Madame Grandfief and her daughter will come to the parsonage to assist in preparing chaplets for the festival of the Assumption. Make us a visit at four o'clock and bring Gerard with you. You will see the ladies, and the young man will have a chance to form an opinion."

M. de Seigneulles assented; the Abbé took his leave and the game of backgammon began.

That evening at supper, the Chevalier received his son with an air of good humor and did not breathe a word of the events of the afternoon. But before going to bed he said to Gerard:

"To-morrow you must not go away, for I wish you to accompany me on a visit to Abbé Valland. And," added he, "you will do me the—the pleas-

ure of purchasing a pair of light gloves. I have had enough of your black ones."

This was the only allusion he ever made to the Willows' ball.

III

The parsonage garden was a strange one. It was situated on the site of an ancient moat of the upper town, and was greatly neglected by the Abbé Valland who knew nothing of gardening. It presented to the eye various styles of cultivation and was a brilliant patchwork of color. Yet in this confusion one might discover the perfect symbol of the spirit of Christian equality that a good pastor is bound to maintain in his flock. Lettuces flourished fraternally by the side of roses of a hundred varieties, lilies alternated with gooseberries; great clumps of angelica, tufts of fennel, and the bushy box-tree, mingled their aromatic odors with the perfume of the clematis. Along the lower terrace, was an avenue of ancient elm trees in the center of which opened a rotunda furnished with stone tables and rustic seats. There was assembled a group of young girls making paper flowers under the direction of the deacon-

ess of the parish, and a young curate who was as lively and as fresh as a lamb. When M. de Seigneulles and Gerard entered the corridor, there was a murmur of feminine voices which resounded from the hedge of elm trees like the buzzing of bees.

The servant ushered them into the parlor where they found the Abbé Valland conversing with Madame Grandfief. She was very tall, with a flat waist and big bones; her manners were imposing; her words were emphatic and imperious. Her square face framed with scanty chestnut locks, vaguely recalled to mind the type of the equine race.

The Abbé introduced the visitors, and M. de Seigneulles began a stiff conversation about common-place matters. This ceremonious interview was very tiresome to Gerard and he was endeavoring to smother his yawns, when the Curé proposed to him to descend into the garden. The young man accepted cheerfully, and as soon as they were out of doors he abandoned the Abbé and his guests who were walking around in a kind of procession, and directed his footsteps toward the elm trees to which he was attracted by merry voices. When he had gained one of the openings, he paused a moment at the entrance of that green,

shadowy avenue where he watched, as in a panorama, the group of lovely girls in their soft, bright draperies, among which the cassock of the curate was the only dark spot.

Near the center of the group was a young girl with very fair complexion and heavy blonde hair that hung loosely on her shoulders.

In her hand she held a plate of red gooseberries which she plucked off and ate as daintily as a bird.

"You are fond of gooseberries, Mlle. Lahey-rard," the curate was saying at that moment, with a strong provincial accent.

"Yes, and I also love to pick them; and you, monsieur?"

"I only care for those that are already picked," he said with a covetous air.

"Do you wish some of mine?" said she.

He made a sign of assent and in the twinkling of an eye the lively girl, without noticing the horrified expressions on the faces of those around her, seized with the tips of her fingers a long, very luscious bunch, and held it close to the lips of the curate.

His face turned crimson. He looked with perplexed embarrassment at the tempting berries, trembling in her pretty fingers, and at the same



time he caught a glimpse of a round white arm which the flowing sleeve left bare.

He stammered out some confused syllables, and beat a hasty retreat to the other end of the avenue of elm trees, wherefrom the Abbé, M. de Seigneulles and Madame Grandfief were watching the scene.

"How thoughtless!" murmured Madame Grandfief in the ear of the Abbé, who only shrugged his shoulders.

The young girl continued to hold the berries between her fingers.

"I will eat them myself, then," she exclaimed with a rippling laugh as she shook them into her rosy mouth.

Gerard had drawn near and observing him, she started with surprise as she encountered his look of amazement.

"Georgette," said Madame Grandfief in a tone of severity, addressing herself to one of the young girls busily engaged making paper flowers, "put on your hat; it is time for us to go home."

The young girl, a brunette with cheeks the color of a ripe peach, great black eyes, and a very plump figure, withdrew from the group and joined her mother.

"This is my daughter," said Madame Grand-

fief to M. de Seigneulles. Georgette made a ceremonious bow.

"She is charming!" murmured the Chevalier gallantly.

The Abbé Valland, endeavoring to give a reproving air to his unctuous physiognomy, had taken the blonde offender aside to the gooseberry bushes.

"Helene," he said, "I beg of you to show more respect for my curate in the future."

"But, Monsieur," replied the young girl, "I do respect and even admire him. If you could only have seen with what an air of a fierce sheep he resisted temptation! He reminded me of St. Anthony with his puppets."

"Terrible child!" growled the Curé, shaking his head.

When M. de Seigneulles and Gerard had left the parsonage and were walking homeward, the Chevalier asked of his son how he was pleased with the young girl.

"She is extremely attractive," replied Gerard dreamily. "What a sweet voice and what magnificent blonde hair!"

"Blonde!" repeated his father, stopping brusquely, "are you near-sighted? It certainly seems to me that she is a brunette."

"Blonde, father; with long curls hanging loosely upon her shoulders."

M. de Seigneulles frowned. "Sangrebleu!" he cried; "to whom do you refer? Surely not to that airy creature with flowing hair. I was speaking of Mlle. Grandfief."

"Ah! I hardly noticed her."

"Ah well! When you have the honor of meeting her again, have the goodness to observe her well. I have been looking at her closely and it would not displease me to have her for a daughter-in-law."

While Gerard and his father were thus conversing, the young girl to whom the Chevalier had alluded to as "that airy creature" had left the parsonage also and was tripping lightly homeward.

"What prudes these provincials are!" she was saying to herself as she walked along. "And how strange it was in papa to come to Juvigny!" And she sighed deeply as she thought of the many things that had happened to embitter their lives since their arrival there.

Her father, formerly a professor of physics at the Saint-Louis Lyceum had made a virtue of necessity in leaving Paris when it began to be difficult for him to get along with a large family, even in the most modest apartments.

"And to think of growing old at Juvigny; of becoming perhaps an old maid, as ugly and dried up as the deaconess of the parish. Oh! no, never!" At that moment Gerard looked back; he was walking a little behind his father, and recognizing Mlle. Laheyrd, bowed to her before he entered the house.

"Ah!" thought the young girl, quickly forgetting her gloomy thoughts, "our neighbor is decidedly good-looking. He is really a handsome fellow and has not that conceited air of the other young men of the town. My conduct to the curate—" And she began to laugh as she recalled the scared looks of the hero of the bunch of gooseberries.

The screams of a child greeted her as she entered the old house occupied by the Inspector of the Academy.

"Well, Tonton, is the house on fire?" she demanded of a young girl about nine years of age who met her with disheveled locks and a dress so short that it exposed to view a notable portion of a pair of thin, dirty legs.

"Helene," cried the child, "Benjamin has torn his pantaloons and mamma says you must mend them instantly."

"Delightful task!" she murmured; "why could you not get along without me?"

"Mamma says you carried away the black thread."

"That is true," she said with a sneer, and diving into her pocket she drew forth a book, a key, some green plums, and finally, a little bag containing thread and needles.

Tonton dragged her into a large room, very simply furnished, which served as a sitting-room and dining-room. There, Benjamin, a lad of eleven, rather wild-looking, was perched on the top of a cupboard, whistling, and waiting for his pantaloons to be mended. Helene put on her thimble, seized the trousers and began to mend the yawning rent; while Tonton, abusing the situation of the unfortunate Benjamin, pinched his legs, provoking peals of shrill laughter.

"Bravo!" cried Marius, whose ruddy face appeared in the doorway, blossoming like a dahlia. "Touching family tableau! *La Vierge au Pantalon!* admirable subject for a poet of the school of common sense. Ah! it is six o'clock, and dinner is not ready yet!"

"Do not be impatient," said Madame Lahey-rard, who at that moment appeared at the kitchen door; "we are about to lay the cover."

Helene took the plates from the cupboard and placed them on the table which was covered

with a plain oil-cloth. The boy Benjamin, having been put into possession of his indispensable garment, was sent in search of his father. Soon the whole family was assembled in the dining-room.

The repast showed clearly the absence of a cook, and this improvised meal was served in the same manner in which it had been prepared, without taste and without art.

"I am worn out!" groaned Madame Laheyward, as she placed her plump elbows upon the table. She was approaching fifty, but she had possessed in her youth a *beauté du diable* that had left her a thick mane of blonde hair, bright eyes, and superb shoulders.

She was always lively and busy, but that noisy activity profited little to the good of the household. She threw away her time arguing with the tradesmen, wrangling with the servants, lamenting the dearth of provisions and the poor resources of a small town.

That evening, at dinner, her complaints were more verbose and bitter than usual; she had dismissed her cook and the dinner had suffered in consequence.

"Frightful country!" she exclaimed, flashing angry glances toward her husband. "You have

indeed treated us badly in bringing us into this miserable borough!"

'But my dear love," replied M. Laheyward, tossing back the long gray hair that fell over his collar, "just reflect; it was you who suggested Juvigny to the administration."

The Inspector of the Academy spoke quietly; in his deliberate and slightly sententious tones, one could detect the old professor enthroned for many years in a University chair. Those measured words had the effect of exasperating them all, particularly Madame Laheyward.

"Oh yes! it was I!" she replied bitterly. "You have told me that fifty times. I was in error and am doing bitter penance for it. The country is hardly habitable; the town is nasty, and as for the inhabitants, don't speak of them! They are stuck-up and ill-bred; we have not had a dozen visitors. That is also your fault, M. Laheyward."

"My fault!" repeated the old professor; "can I force people to come to my house?"

"You have not asserted yourself at Juvigny; now, they give dinners everywhere; have you only made the slightest advances so as to have them invite your wife and daughter?"

"I go on the principle of never imposing on

anybody," responded the worthy old man; "it is more honorable."

"It is more selfish! Say rather that you prefer to bury yourself in your books!"

M. Laheyrdard looked up and glanced a moment at his wife with his intelligent but weary eyes.

"Melanie," he said gently, "you go too far. If you are neglected at Juvigny, you should remember that it is perhaps more your fault than mine."

Madame Laheyrdard bit her lips. That slight allusion to the history of her indiscreet youth threw a cold shower on her nervous excitement.

Marius arose with an air of impatience, and after filling his pipe went to finish the evening out of doors. The Inspector, to escape further lamentations, took refuge in the garden. Helene hastened to clear away the table, and then ran to join her father under the trees.

IV

Helene was the only member of the family who loved and appreciated M. Laheyward. She saw him tormented by the exacting demands of her mother, turned into ridicule by Marius, and seldom obeyed by the children, in whom there had never been inculcated the principles of reverence and submission. While she felt herself superior in heart and soul to the rest of the family, she forced herself to help him forget all his little domestic miseries by showing him many affectionate attentions. She interested herself in his work, and he, in his turn, encouraged her in the study of drawing and painting. When he was weary of his books she diverted him with her lively talk. For M. Laheyward, amid the noise and bustle of his administrative labors, the cheery chatting of Helene was like the song of a robin-redbreast on a winter day.

That evening, he walked for a long time with

folded arms down the grassy garden walk, then, after kissing his daughter on the brow, he returned to his study, while Helene went in search of the children to put them to bed.

When she came downstairs, leaving the two little monkeys snugly tucked in, Madame Lahey-rard, who was always gadding about, had already gone to make a tour of the town. Helene retired into a large room which opened upon the garden and which she used for a studio. The walls were hung with pictures; near the piano covered with music, in one corner of the room, stood a wooden easel; on a table a bunch of field flowers blossomed in a crockery pot. The first thing that met the eyes of the young girl was the imprint of the five little fingers of Tonton upon the canvas on which a picture was freshly sketched. Helene stamped her foot with rage.

"Little wretch!" she cried, and seized with a violent fit of ill-humor she went to sit on the stone steps that led into the garden. There, with her elbows on her knees and her fingers thrust into her hair, she fixed her melancholy gaze upon the gorge of Palval illuminated by the last rays of the setting sun.

Juvigny weighed upon her spirits. Born in Paris, a Parisian to the rosy tips of her fingers,

she could not accustom herself to that dead calm, those straight horizons, and the sordid interests of a small town. This provincial life had the effect of a visit too long prolonged to tire-some people, in a house that is gloomy and misty. Afar off in the suburbs, a squeaking organ played a tune which she remembered hearing on the Boulevard. All her impressions of Parisian life awakened in her memory. She recalled her balcony in the fourth story of a house in the Rue D'Assas, which overlooked a tennis-court in the Luxembourg, where the players assembled in their white and red coats, and orange hose; and where, upon the level terrace, the students and bourgeois of that quarter promenaded at twilight. In her imagination she revisited the museum where she was once installed with her easel and her square of canvas to copy the *Labourage Nivernais*. She was homesick for all these things. She would have given two years of her life to hear again the clamor of the watchmen crying under the lofty ceilings—

"On va fermer! On va fermer!"

Overcome with a sudden revolt and irritation, she cried out in anger throwing up her arms: "Oh, I am so weary, so weary!"

"Perhaps I may prove a slight diversion," said a satirical voice behind her.

She turned her head wearily. "Ah! it is you, M. Finoël; good evening."

"I have been talking business with M. Lahey-rard, and he told me you were here, so I took the liberty of entering. Are you ill?"

"No, I am nervous; that is all. You are welcome."

In the twilight shadows, one could but vaguely distinguish the ill-shaped figure and sallow face of the visitor. His large jaundiced eyes, hollow cheeks, and compressed lips, had an expression at once suffering and spirituelle, indicating a disordered organization. Francelin Finoël was in fact affected with a curvature of the spine, and out of pity for this deformity he was admitted into the intimacy of the Lahey-rard family. His office as assistant chief-clerk of the Prefecture had brought him in contact with the Inspector of the Academy, and as he was obliging, an agreeable talker, and a good musician, Madame Lahey-rard, who was scarcely noticed in Juvigny society, had received cordially this poor sickly visitor, regarding him, however, as of not much consequence.

"How are you to day?" said Helene, as she offered him her hand which he pressed eagerly in his long emaciated fingers. There was something tender and friendly in the accents of the

young girl. Her native goodness of heart made her kind to this deformed and unfortunate human being. This compassionate familiarity surprised many people, and those who thought ill of the young girl were disposed to confound that sympathetic pity with a more lively sentiment. To see the eyes of Francelin Finoël suddenly light up as they rested upon her face, one would have said that the hunchback himself had mistaken the nature of the cordial demonstrations of Mlle. Laheyraud.

"I always feel well when I am here," he responded in a caressing voice; "even the touch of your hand cures me."

She laughed and began to light the candles on the piano.

"If you wish me to be entirely amiable," she said, "you will permit me to return to my seat on the steps; the fresh evening air will quiet my nerves." And she resumed unceremoniously the position in which he had found her, her face resting on her hands, her eyes fixed on space. Seated on the piano stool, Finoël devoured her with his eyes while she remained silent, absorbed in her reverie.

"Does my want of ceremony offend you?" she asked, after awhile; "for you see I have already

been an object of scandal to-day at the parsonage, and I do not wish to be again at fault. By the way, at the house of Abbé Valland there was a neighbor of ours, M. de Seigneulles; do you know him?"

"Slightly, but not enough to like him."

"Why? He has a fine expressive face, a haughty manner, a brown mustache, and for all that he blushes like a school girl. That timidity is as becoming to his grave face as are flowers to great trees."

"Gerard de Seigneulles," replied Finoël disdainfully, "is one of those handsome boys who come into the world to hold out their hands and receive everything as a gift; full of egotism, narrow-minded; a brilliant, luxuriant plant, but useless."

"I love those flowers that are beautiful and useless," interrupted Helene in emphatic tones. "I love everything that is bright and glittering."

The evening was warm and the fire-flies came from the garden to flutter about the candles.

"So do *they*," replied the little hunchback ironically, pointing to the imprudent insects as they were scorched by the flame.

"You are sarcastic this evening, M. Finoël," said Helene rising and seating herself at the

piano. "Sing me a song; that will dissipate your gloomy thoughts."

She struck a few chords and indicated with her finger the score of *Don Juan* opened at the *serenade*. Francelin obeyed her and began to sing. He had a marvelous voice, clear and vibrating; the sounds escaping from his lips seemed too ideal to be human; it was more as if a spirit sang.

While accompanying him on the piano, Helene drank in the charm of that sweet, strange voice. When the song was ended she turned and encountered the gaze of the hunchback fixed upon her, and she was suddenly overcome with intense embarrassment.

"What beautiful hair you have!" he murmured softly.

"Do you think so?" she said, passing her fingers through her flowing ringlets with a gesture of native coquetry. "Bah! what good are they? Some of these days they will have to be twisted up in a frightful coil, when I go to teach in some gloomy pension."

"What an absurd idea!" said Finoël shrugging his shoulders.

"I am in earnest, we are poor; I am a girl without a dowry, and it will be necessary for me

to earn my bread. A governess. or under-teacher; that will be my lot; it will be much better than to die of ennui at Juvigny a faded old maid."

"You are not one to be left to fade," he replied with animation. "Have you then no ambition? Beautiful and richly endowed by nature as you are, do you never dream of a domestic life, of children, of a proud husband who will make you the queen of his little home?"

She shook her head.

"No; some gentleman farmer perhaps—If I were homely and deformed—"

She had hardly spoken the last word when she observed an expression of bitterness on the lips of Finoël and she discovered that she was about to make a cruel, thoughtless speech. In a moment her clear brown eyes filled with tears. Vexed at her blunder, grieved at having wounded the young man, Helene held out her hand to him.

"I wished to say," she continued confusedly, "that I am unfitted for a wife."

"I understand," he said sadly, holding her hand within his own with a passionate insistence. "Do you believe that I am your friend? Well promise me to take no serious step without first consulting me. Swear it to me!"

She looked at him in astonishment.

"I promise you," she said, a little frightened; "There! are you satisfied?"

"Thanks," he murmured, releasing her hand.

Meanwhile Madame Laheyraud returned from visiting in the lower town, and entered the studio. It was ten o'clock; Finoël took his leave.

The house which the hunchback occupied was a poor one, situated a short distance from the old college building. The ground floor and basement were inhabited by a weaver and his family, and the rooms on the second floor were rented furnished. Francelin ascended to his modest chamber which was full of dusty old manuscripts and documents of every description. Not feeling disposed to sleep, he leaned out of the window that opened on the college gardens.

Francelin Finoël was an illegitimate child; his mother a washer-woman who had worked out by the day had been dead nearly ten years. He had been a charity pupil in that same college whose trees overshadowed his window. He had made the most of his advantages and by force of will had succeeded in breaking away from the miserable surroundings wherein he had spent his childhood. Step by step he had climbed up the social ladder at Juvigny. At the age of twenty-one he was appointed assistant-chief of a bureau at the

Prefecture, having gained the good-will of the Secretary General of the Department. This, however, was a small result in the eyes of the confident, ambitious Finoël. The son of a washer-woman was at last admitted on an equal footing into the salons of the rich manufacturers and the high functionaries at Juvigny. His talent for music had already opened for him the doors of many houses, but there were others that still remained obstinately closed to him. Since the arrival of the Laheyards, his ambition had received a violent spur. Dazzled by the beauty of Helene, intoxicated by her graceful familiarity and winning manners, he lived in a mirage, and dreamed of his becoming the husband of Mlle. Laheyard.

"Why not?" he said to himself that evening, as he listened to the tic-tac of the weaver's loom. "Helene is poor and will not find it easy to marry; with my brains and energy I am superior to the other young men here. With her for a wife, I feel that I would be able to make a stir in the little world of Juvigny, and to climb over all these people to attain my end. I may be able to get appointed to the Municipal Council, and to supplant the Mayor, who is a nonentity. Who knows? In this time of universal suffrage I may be sent to parliament!"

A cool breeze rustled through the branches of the trees and recalled him to the reality of things. At that moment, the voice of a young girl was wafted to his ears, and by the light of the moon he distinguished the coquettish face and form of little Reine, looking out between the pots of balsam in an adjoining window.

"So you have returned?" said the seamstress.

Reine was the niece of the weaver who lived on the ground floor; in her childhood she had played with Finoël; and the two kept on terms of intimacy for many years. She also for three or four years, had cherished ambitious hopes; it was to become a married woman. She wished to marry Francelin, and in her turn she said to herself: "Why not?"

As the young man remained silent, she repeated her question.

"Yes," replied Finoël dryly, impatient at being disturbed, "I have just come in and I am going to bed."

"You have become very stuck-up since you began visiting the beautiful ladies of the upper town! Those Parisians have turned your head, my poor Francelin."

You will oblige me by leaving these ladies in peace," said Finoël angrily. "Good-night."

"My patience!" murmured Reine, who wished to have the last word. "But those who seek for wool return shorn, and you will be clipped, my beautiful bleating lamb!"

Finoël closed the window noisily and went to bed, furious.

V

Satisfied with his first interview with Madame Grandfief, M. de Seigneulles boldly decided to mention the important question of marriage. At his request the Abbé Valland and Madame de Travanette had sounded the Grandfief household, and their advances having been received favorably, the Chevalier had instructed his notary to confer with them in regard to settlements.

Like a prudent man, the Chevalier deemed it best not to mix money matters with affairs of the heart. But as soon as the basis of these documents had been agreed upon, he put himself directly in communication with Madame Grandfief and her husband; and they decided that Gerard should be permitted to pay his court to the young lady.

The old gentleman desired that his son should please her as an amiable gentleman, before being regarded as a future husband.

The subject of marriage was not to be broached until the two young people had become attached to each other of their own free will, and Madame Grandfief sure of the obedience of her daughter, and convinced of the irresistible fascination of her beauty, accepted the conditions, although they seemed to her ridiculously romantic.

Twice a week, Gerard spent the afternoon at Salvanches, which was situated beyond the avenue of Willows, in a great park through which flowed the noisy Ornain.

Occasionally, the young man was accompanied by his father; sometimes chaperoned by Madame de Travanette or the Abbé Valland. These ceremonious interviews passed away in a very gloomy fashion. Carrying out strictly the programme imposed by her mother, Georgette, sitting upright in her chair, nose in the air and eyes downcast, preserved a modest silence.

If Gerard addressed a word to her, she would raise slightly her eyelids, fringed with dark lashes, and look first at Madame Grandfief, as if seeking the proper response in the maternal eyes. When she at last decided to speak, she seemed to be reciting a lesson. She was beautiful, and yet her great black eyes were more brilliant than profound; her retroussé nose, her rosy cheeks

and her *mignonne* mouth gave to her a certain piquant, sensual grace; but she was narrow-minded and little cultivated, and her simplicity had become proverbial. Her conversation was full of details about gowns and bonnets which did not in the least interest Gerard. He was by nature reserved, and would only expand under the influence of sympathy; so he remained cold and taciturn, leaving the burden of the conversation to the Abbé or to Madame de Travanette; these regular visits to Salvanches were regarded by him as a disagreeable duty, and he never failed to return home very sleepy, tired and melancholy.

One August afternoon, after one of these sittings, he came back particularly morose. Having climbed though the vineyard he walked along the path that lay between his father's possessions and that of his neighbor. M. Laheyrd. He was soon startled by joyous cries and a burst of merry laughter. Raising his head, he perceived two children dragging between them a ladder, but as Gerard approached, they suddenly disappeared behind the wall of the terrace.

"Tonton! Benjamin!" cried an aerial, silvery voice. "Bring back the ladder, instantly!"

Triumphant peals of laughter was the only answer to this command.

"Mischievous wretches!" continued the mysterious voice.

In the neighboring orchard, the branches of a vigorous plum-tree became suddenly agitated, and, looking up, Gerard discovered Mlle. Helene Laheyward seated among the branches, holding in one hand a large slice of bread, and with the other gathering green-gage plums. She was charming; bare-headed, her hair floating in the breeze; a rose tint upon her cheeks and her great dark eyes sparkling with animation.

The sunbeams struggling through the foliage of the tree fell alternately on her face and throat in rapid touches of light and shade; a slight breeze moving the hem of her dress revealed two tiny boots and a pair of shapely ankles. When she saw Gerard, Helene, with a lovely gesture, at once modest and coquettish, caught the fluttering folds of her linen skirt beneath one little foot, and her glances meeting those of the young man, she could not refrain from smiling.

"Mademoiselle," said Gerard, lifting his hat, "permit me to go in search of the ladder."

"Do not take that trouble, Monsieur," she replied, "the children will themselves return it when they find that their pranks have not disturbed me in the least."



Gerard thought her marvelously beautiful in that frame of green foliage. Such a radiant manifestation of feminine loveliness had the effect of conquering his reserve and timidity.

"Permit me to remain awhile," he pleaded, "to keep you company until Tonton has brought back the ladder?"

He trembled lest his request should not be well received, but Helene looked as if she thought it quite natural.

"Willingly," she said; "besides, as we are neighbors, I wish to redeem myself in your eyes. This is not the first time I have shocked you; you remember the bunch of gooseberries?"

Gerard opened his mouth to protest, but she interrupted him merrily.

"You must not judge me altogether by such giddy behavior, for if my brother Marius were here, he would tell you that I am a serious girl, only a little obstinate."

At this last word, Gerard opened his eyes very wide.

"But I am talking like a simpleton," she said laughing. "Ah me! I am not prudent and well trained like Georgette Grandfief! You know her, I believe—If her mother should surprise her perched, as I am, in a plum-tree, what a sermon! I can hear her say: '*Fi donc! mademoiselle!*'"

She rolled her fine eyes, pinched up her lips, and mimicked the sententious tones of Madame Grandfief in so droll a manner, that Gerard could not refrain from laughing.

"You have a charming talent for acting," he said.

"I possess a number of charming talents that make me pass for a girl very badly reared. I often try to imprison my wayward impulses, but I forget to shut the door and *prrrrou!*—the wanton birds are off! I shock people at first, but after awhile they find me delightful, I assure you."

"I do not doubt it," cried Gerard, who meant what he said. Leaning on the orchard wall, he threw toward Helene glances full of admiration. Every now and then she thrust her hands through the foliage in quest of the rosy plums already bursting with ripeness, revealing the juicy golden pulp. She pressed them daintily between her pretty lips, and bit off her slice of bread unceremoniously. The sunlight gleamed on the enamel of her pearl-like teeth, and on her white arms in their flowing open sleeves. Gerard was dazzled; he felt transformed, and discovered himself possessed with a boldness he never dreamed of.

Moved by this emotion, which flew to his head like strong new wine, he was tempted to say to

the young girl: "You are too adorably beautiful!"

His eyes spoke his admiration, and the words trembled on his lips, but he dared not utter them.

At last his tongue was loosened.

"Yes," said he, "I am sure that you are as good as you are beautiful; good, like everything that is fresh and spontaneous—the flowers and the sun!"

"A truce to your compliments!" cried Helene in a decided voice. "In the first place, your comparison is not apropos. The sun is not always good, for this afternoon it is in a fair way of burning my neck so that I will not dare to show it next week at the Grandfief's ball; for you know there is to be a ball at Salvanches. You love to dance I believe," she added with a glance of roguish malice.

At this allusion to the adventure of the Wil-lows' ball, Gerard blushed and stammered.

"As for myself," continued Helene, "I would go five leagues on foot through the rain, to dance one quadrille. So, as I have a horror of being a wall-flower, I am endeavoring to show you, this afternoon, the most attractive side of my temper, that you may not be ashamed to invite me to dance next Thursday."

She was interrupted by a ringing voice:

"Do not be impatient, Helene; I am bringing the ladder of deliverance!"

And Marius Laheyrd emerged from a clump of hazel-nut trees, dragging the ladder which the children had stolen away.

"By Zeus!" he cried, on perceiving Gerard, "my dancer with the black gloves! You are then acquainted with M. de Seigneulles, madcap?"

Gerard explained how they chanced to meet, while Helene, placing her feet on the first round of the ladder, gathered up her skirts and leaped to the ground. Gerard bowed to them and was about to take his leave, when Marius grasped him by the arm.

"No," he cried impetuously, "you have never put your foot into our domain and now we intend to keep you. To-day we have a passable roast, and you must dine with us."

Gerard wished to refuse, but Helene reiterated gayly her brother's invitation; he could not resist the temptation, and allowed himself to be led into the house of the Inspector.

Madame Laheyrd was very proud of her son's new friend, and the old professor gave to his young neighbor a welcome at once grave and friendly; so he very soon felt entirely at ease. The dinner was presentable this time, the

children well-behaved, the linen faultlessly white, and the roast done to a turn. Rendered especially merry by the good cheer and the presence of a stranger, Marius seized this occasion to expound his most eccentric theories. Helene applauded him gayly, whilst now and then, when the jests of the poet overshot their mark, the silent M. Laheyraud shrugged his shoulders and reproached him in mild accents.

In this atmosphere of good humor, having before his eyes the radiant smile and spirited glances of Helene, Gerard's reserve melted rapidly away, like a shriveled leaf of tea that, under the influence of the warm water, expands, relaxes, and, resuming its natural shape, gives out all its perfume.

When the coffee was served, he felt himself already a new man. He became talkative and told them of his lonely childhood in the old house in the upper town; of his youth spent in the college of the Jesuits at Metz; of his studies at Nancy with the ancient dowager for a chaperon.

Helene was greatly amused.

"That father of yours is very stern," she said, "and I, no doubt, shocked him greatly the other day at the parsonage. How different is our

father to us! He is never harsh," and she turned to caress M. Laheyward.

"Yes," murmured the old professor, "they lead me by the nose."

"So much so," continued the lively young girl, taking the nose of her father between her slender fingers, "so much so, that his nose is actually elongated; but we dearly love our father," and she gently rubbed her satin cheek against the long beard of the old man. In a sudden outburst of affection, she embraced her father, while Gerard looked with admiration at the lovely tableau; the old man with his rather unkempt gray locks and the beautiful blonde girl with her arm about his neck.

At last M. Laheyward disengaged himself and went to his library to work. Madame Laheyward had gone to put the children to bed; Marius smoked in the garden; Helene and Gerard were left alone near the steps, at the foot of a great mulberry tree. The shadows of twilight were beginning to fall; the crickets chirped and the moths of the vineyard buzzed above the blooming phlox. Helene approached a cluster of lilacs and imprisoned in her hands one of the insects that flitted among the blossoms, then coming close to Gerard, she opened her fingers a little that he might see it.

"Is it not beautiful?" she said, "with its pointed head, its great eyes shining like black diamonds, and its wings of a delicate rosy gray?"

To see it better, Gerard took the fingers of Helene between his own and held them on a level with his lips. Mlle. Laheyraud felt upon her hands the warm breath of the young man.

"How exquisitely the wings are shaped!" he murmured.

"I wish that I had a dress of that rose color," cried Helene. "I will imprison it under a glass so that I may paint it to-morrow."

"No," replied Gerard, "be generous. It was immured so long in the dark prison of a chrysalis."

"Like you!" said Helene, thoughtlessly.

"Yes, like me," he replied gayly, "and this is perhaps *his* first night of feasting; let him go free."

"Well spoken," said Helene; "go then, Bohemian; regain thy liberty and spend it joyously!"

She opened her hands, and the moth flew away. Gerard remained pensive; perhaps he was thinking that the analogy between himself and the butterfly ended there; while the insect took its flight toward the dewy phlox, *his* heart still re-

mained a hostage in the little hands of Helene Laheyraud.

That night, when he re-entered his father's house, he felt that his whole being had undergone a transformation that had come and brightened the gloom he had lived in hitherto, like the diffused light that is shed above the forest when the moon rises.

VI

After that first evening, Gerard returned many times to the home of Marius. Aided by a subtle capitulation with his conscience, he regarded these visits, concealed from his father, as a compensation for the ennui he suffered at Salvanches. He did not consider his engagement with Georgette serious; he went to the Grandfief mansion in obedience to the commands of M. de Seigneulles, and after having performed that fastidious duty he rewarded himself by a flight to the home of the Laheyrards, where they welcomed him with that easy familiarity so natural to Parisians, accustomed to forming new ties quickly. Madam Laheyrard scolded him for not coming oftener, and Helene treated him like an old friend.

She felt strangely drawn to this young man, so timid and yet so enthusiastic, with such a cultivated mind, utterly free from affectation,

and to whom a provincial education gave the charm and freshness of a wild fruit. Little by little, she gained his confidence; she showed him her drawings, played on the piano and sang for him; and talked to him of Paris, which he had never seen.

The conversation of Helene, both clever and thoughtless; sometimes serious and then again bantering; bristling with strange words borrowed from the cant of studios, revealed to Gerard unknown and seductive horizons. Near her, he felt as ignorant as a carp; still, when he was with her he was more self-possessed and more eloquent than anywhere else.

The young girl inspired him with an *aplomb* and confidence of which he never believed himself capable. Between them, however, there had never passed a single word of love—not even a token of that gallantry which is almost always a common interchange in worldly conversations. But sometimes there came long, restless silences; a sweet thrill at the touch of two hands, while turning the leaves of the music; a flower plucked and given at the moment of parting. It was nothing, but it was delicious. The best of love is in these mute beginnings, and Gerard drank in with delight this *andante* of the amorous symphony.

One evening, just after Gerard had left Helene, Francelin Finoël entered the studio.

The young girl was seated at the piano playing a tune, a favorite melody of Gerard, and there was something in the atmosphere that breathed of his recent presence, for Finoël began immediately to speak of M. de Seigneulles.

"He has just left me," said Helene.

"Ah!" murmured Finoël, "he has been here then!" and he added maliciously:

"There is much talk in town of his engagement to Mlle. Grandfief."

Helene turned pale. This unexpected news caused her a cruel emotion. Although she realized that she had no claim on the heart of Gerard, she felt a keen pang and thought it very hard on Finoël's part to make such disagreeable revelations.

"Ah!" she said with affected indifference, "there is nothing astonishing in that. M. Gerard Seigneulles is of age and eligible, and Georgette Grandfief is a good *parti*. Apropos of the Grandfiefs, have you heard that they are soon to give a ball?"

"When?" demanded Finoël anxiously.

"Next Thursday. The invitations are out; my father received one yesterday, and you will no doubt find one on your return home."

Francelin appeared visibly agitated. He had always ardently desired to be invited to the house of Madame Grandfief, whose parlors were the most exclusive in Juvigny. An invitation there was to the ambitious young man equivalent to a letter of naturalization into the highest social circles of the little town. His agitation became so manifest that Helene hastened to reassure him.

"I have often spoken of you to Georgette," she said; "and as there will be music, you are too good a musician to be overlooked."

Nevertheless, Francelin was only moderately tranquil; he was restless, and shortening his visit, he descended the steps, almost running along the side of the college. With a trembling hand he thrust the key into the door, and lighted his candle. He then threw a rapid glance around the apartment, but he saw nowhere the ardently coveted invitation. His heart began to beat violently; he continued his search, examining closely each piece of furniture. Nothing.

Then, furious, he was bounding down the steps to question the wife of the weaver, when he met Reine Lecomte, who held in her hand a folded paper.

He snatched it from her.

Alas! it was only the town journal!

"Are you sure," he said, "that they have not brought me an invitation to the ball at Salvanches?"

"My aunt has received nothing," replied little Reine, with a malicious gleam in her black eyes.

The lips of Francelin turned pale.

"It is an oversight," he murmured, in a stifled voice.

"No, it is not an oversight," said Reine with emphasis, for she had no pity for the misfortune of her old friend.

"How do you know?" he muttered, his eyes flashing with anger.

"I know," replied Reine pitilessly, "because I was at Salvanches when Mlle. Grandfief proposed to her mother to invite you; to which Madame Grandfief responded coldly: 'No, no, I do not like *mixed* company.' Is not that sufficiently clear?"

The little hunchback remained silent. A dumb rage gnawed at his heart, and tears of anger and humiliation gathered in his eyes. Reine, perceiving his grief, repented instantly of having struck such a brutal blow.

"I have wounded you, my poor Francelin," she said gently; "but when I see intelligent peo-

ple like you making a laughing-stock of themselves, and in danger of breaking their necks in foolish attempts, it grates upon my nerves, and I cannot resist crying out, 'beware'!"

Finoël remained mute and sullen. The little seamstress laid her hand affectionately on his arm. "You see," she continued, "these rich people sometimes treat us politely, but at heart they despise us and think we are made of different clay from themselves. I know this but too well, for I go to their houses every day, and I have keen ears. Remain with your equals, Francelin,—at least with those who love you for yourself. And as to this ball, if you are curious to know what happens there, I will tell you myself, for they have bespoken me for the dressing-room. I will describe to you the costumes of the ladies, and will bring to you the names of those who dance with Mlle. Laheyward."

Every word that she spoke pierced Francelin's heart like an arrow; when she pronounced the name of Helene, his heart throbbed with anguish, and pushing roughly from his shoulder the hand of the little seamstress, he cried:

"Enough! you are tiresome; I am sick and wish to be left alone."

Reine shrugged her shoulders and went out, slamming the door behind her.

Francelin took his seat near the window. The night was splendid; every moment, brilliant meteors shot across the clear, starry skies, and glided silently behind the trees in the college grounds.

In the heavens there seemed to be a great fete; a mysterious ball of the stars! Francelin almost wished in his heart that, by a sudden convulsion, that myriad of twinkling stars would fall in a shower of fire upon this town where he was treated as a pariah.

How diversely the very same outlook will impress this or that human being!

While the sullen hunchback, contemplating the dazzling stars and the flashing of the meteors discovered in the magnificent natural display nothing but the image of some great, sinister disturbance, two hundred feet above him, in his little chamber on the Rue du Tribel, Gerard de Seigneulles lay awake with his eyes fixed on the brilliant heavens. He could hear in the distance the faint sounds of Helene's piano, and, following with a fascinated gaze the flight of the shooting stars, he compared them, in his enthusiasm, to a shower of golden lilies falling softly upon the home of his beloved.

VII

The whole of Juvigny had been thrown into a flutter of excitement at the announcement of the Grandfief soirée, and for eight days it was the subject of conversation in both the upper and lower towns.

At Salvanches, the great hall on the first floor, where no one had been received for years, would be painted and decorated anew, it was said. They had ordered the flowers from Paris, also the supper which would end the ball. The seamstresses worked till past midnight cutting out the corsages and festooning the skirts with flounces of tulle. The carriages were all hired in advance; Salvanches was a half-league from the town; every vehicle in Juvigny was engaged, from the simple char-a-banc, suspended on its bare axle-tree, to the dusty barouche perched high on old-fashioned springs and ornamented with huge footboards.

At last, Thursday arrived. At eight o'clock already, the Grandfief family stood under their sculptured coat of arms at the entrance of the grand salon, awaiting their guests; for, at Juvigny, balls began at an early hour, the ladies struggling to be punctual in order to obtain the best places. M. Grandfief, bland, good-natured and peaceable, smothered in a white cravat, cramped in shining boots, spent the moments of waiting in walking about on the tips of his toes, moderating the lights in the chandeliers and straightening the tapers in the candlesticks.

His son, Anatole, a college student about fifteen years old, arrayed in a brand-new jacket, was making courageous efforts to push his hands into a pair of straw-colored gloves, while before the mirror, Georgette was practicing how to use her fan. Dignified and majestic, in a robe of orange velvet which revealed but too much her bony shoulders, Madame Grandfief moved about with the air of a queen, taking a last look at the parlors, billiard-hall, ball-room, and dressing-room where little Reine was installed, assisted by a *femme de chambre*.

During these comings and goings, she addressed to her husband and children brief, but solemn words of admonition.

"Georgette," she said to her daughter, "you must not dance more than once with the same person."

"No mamma. And with M. de Seigneulles?"

"Twice only. Between the quadrilles, there will be vocal music, and you must accompany the singers on the piano."

"I think I hear a carriage," cried Anatole, who was on the lookout in the corridor.

In fact, the rolling of wheels was heard on the sands of the garden illuminated with lanterns. The whole family hastened to take their positions at the entrance of the parlors, and ere long the frou-frou of skirts rustled upon the stone steps.

"They are our cousins, the Provençhères," whispered Anatole, who had cautiously peeped into the dressing-room.

They brusquely exchanged their haughty attitudes for a manner at once disdainful and indifferent.

"Pooh!" grumbled M. Grandfief, "it would be just like them to arrive before the lamps are lighted."

"Georgette," said Madame Grandfief, "find them places yourself so that they may not monopolize the best ones."

The Provençhères ladies were poor relatives who were invited from a sense of duty, and who were treated with scant consideration.

The three advanced at the same time in the stiff, affected manner of people who are not accustomed to going into society. The daughters already *passées*, wore shabby silk dresses, slippers which they had themselves covered with satin to hide the worn leather, and white gloves that betrayed by their numerous stains the obstinate work of gum elastic. The mother wore a gown of snuff-colored silk and a bonnet adorned with artificial grapes.

"What beautiful display, cousin!" she cried out, throwing an envious glance at the brilliant chandeliers and the profusion of flowers. "You must have expended a hundred francs on the stairway alone."

In the meantime other guests began to pour in: solemn magistrates with their wives hanging upon their arms, attired in watered silk; stout manufacturers with ruddy faces and loud voices; groups of young girls enveloped in clouds of tulle. Then the young men: notary clerks, professors, supernumeraries scrupulously shaven and neatly gloved, and here and there in the crowd, the sons of the spinning-mill proprietors and

iron-masters of that vicinity, easily recognizable by their elaborate attire, and by that *aplomb* which invariably denotes men, wealthy and influential in the country.

Gerard de Seigneulles was among the last to arrive. He glanced rapidly over the ball-room. Helene was not there, and he felt a keen pang of disappointment. The orchestra gave the signal for a quadrille, and following the instructions of his father, the young nobleman invited Georgette Grandfief to dance. The young girl had counted upon this, and had reserved that dance for him, as she hoped that the music and the animation of the ball would drive away the habitual reserve of her partner. But she was bound to be disappointed; for, during the intervals between the figures, the conversation dragged along in its usual formal way. Gerard kept his eyes on the door, and only opened his lips to speak the most commonplace monosyllables. Georgette returned to her seat very much out of sorts.

The crowd began to drift toward the billiard-hall; the first bowl of punch had loosened the tongues and broken the ice. The young men fluttered gayly around the sofas and arm-chairs where a group of young girls were assembled,

chatting and laughing merrily behind their fans, or sticking their pretty noses into their bouquets. A joyous hum of voices mingled with the rustling of silken gowns filled the grand salon where the atmosphere was warm and luminous.

Alone, the lad, Anatole, seated on a bench, was thinking that, on the whole, a ball as a diversion was far inferior to a game of tag. He was amusing himself by putting his fingers into his ears, alternately shutting and opening them, to enjoy the singular contrast between the sudden noisy uproar and the artificial silence. All at once a lull succeeded the tumultuous hum of voices, and every eye was turned toward the door, where appeared Madame Lahey-rard, accompanied by Marius and Helene.

Madame Lahey-rard, who wore a rose-colored costume cut very *décolleté*, and was leaning proudly upon the arm of her son, made her way toward the hostess. The poet was superb; his luxuriant blonde beard rested upon a white cravat with long floating ends; and he had ordered for the occasion a vest of sky blue satin which could not fail to create a sensation.

"I do not wish to be taken for a notary," he had said, "and the stylish color of the vest is

intended to correct the bourgeois tone of the coat and the black pantaloons."

As to Helene, her toilet excited a murmur of admiration from the men and brought a frown of jealousy to the brows of the women.

Her dress was of white gauze and displayed marvelously the grace of her perfect form. Resting lightly upon this airy, silken stuff was a simple wild blackberry vine, fruit and flower, looping here and there the drapery of her skirt. This vine was caught on the shoulder, just where the gauze revealed her milk-white arm, by a butterfly with azure wings, and among the ringlets of her magnificent blonde hair there nestled gracefully a wreath of the same wild vine.

Sure of the effect of this toilet, at once so simple and elegant, the coquettish young girl looked about with her great brown eyes, without any false modesty, yet at the same time without boldness; then she took a seat near her mother with an ease and elegance that put the finishing touch to the exasperation of those around her. In the twinkling of an eye, as if by a tacit understanding, there was a movement of retreat in the neighboring groups that completely isolated the new-comers.

As the mother of the young student Anatole,

Madame Grandfief felt quite desirous to keep on good terms with the University officials and to be friendly to the wife of the Inspector. Perceiving at once the chilly attitude of her guests toward the Laheyrards, she whispered a word into the ear of Georgette who went right over and sat beside Helene.

"My mother wishes you to give us some music," she said to Helene. "Have you brought any of those songs which you sing so well?"

"I know them by heart," replied Helene, "and I am at your disposal."

She crossed the room and seated herself at the piano, drawing off her gloves with a little jerk, in order to accompany herself.

Amid a profound silence she sang that old *love song*, set to the air of an old dance, which our fathers called the *Romanesque*.

"Au fond des halliers,
Du grand bois qui bourgeonne.
Entends-tu les ramiers,
O ma mignonne?
D'aimer et d'être aimé
Voici l'heure,
Contre mon coeur charmé,
Ah! demeure—
Mignonne, est-il rose qui fleure
Mieux que l'amour, l'amour au mois de mai?"

Helene's voice was so soft and her accent so tender, yet so clear and penetrating, that, notwithstanding the prejudices of Juvigny society, she was warmly applauded.

"What enthusiasm!" whispered ill-humoredly cousin Provenchères to her eldest daughter. "For me, I consider it very bad form for young girls to sing songs that treat so boldly of love."

Gerard hastened to compliment Helene. She gave him her hand with a radiant smile.

"How do you like my dress?" she said, turning round gayly for him to admire it better. "Have I your approval?"

"You are too beautiful!" replied the young man, dazzled by her loveliness. "That garland of berries seems just to have been plucked from the forest. It gives you an inexpressibly fresh charm, and beside you, the other dancers are like wilted hot-house plants."

"Are you speaking sincerely?"

"From the depths of my heart!"

His sincere admiration was so eloquently expressed in his eyes, that Helene could not doubt it.

She was bewitching, and Gerard invited her to dance the first mazourka before leaving her.

"You are acquainted with M. de Seigneulles



then?" said Georgette, who came up unexpectedly.

"Certainly; we are neighbors, and M. Gerard is a friend of my brother."

"Truly!" said Mlle. Grandfief, "he has never mentioned it to me. Well, my dear," she continued, taking Helene aside, "I am going to tell you a secret."

"A secret!"

"Yes; and in exchange, you must do me a favor. It concerns my marrying M. de Seigneulles. Have you heard it?"

Helene nodded her head and remained silent. She felt her joy suddenly melting away, leaving her heart as cold as ice. The rumors of the marriage were not new to her, but without knowing why, she treated them as mere gossip; Georgette's words now ruthlessly confirmed them.

"They wish us to marry," said Georgette, "and my mother imagines that all is going well because she has the consent of the Chevalier, but I am not of her opinion. I find my betrothed cold and indifferent, and I wish I knew if he really cares for me."

Helene became very pale and bit the end of her fan with an embarrassed air; but Georgette

was so occupied with herself that she did not observe this tale-telling attitude.

"You will certainly dance with him," she continued; "take that opportunity to turn the conversation upon me, and endeavor to make M. Gerard express himself. You alone can render me this service; in the first place, because you have the spirit and dare to speak; my other friends are jealous of me and would not be sorry to separate us, while you—"

"Yes, I do not count," said Helene, trying to mask her feelings with a smile.

"I did not say that; but then you do not dream of marrying here, and that is the main point. Go, my dear, and do this for me, and if, during the conversation, you find an opportunity of sounding my praise, do not restrain yourself."

The orchestra began to play a mazourka and the two girls separated.

VIII

They played a mazourka; it was the dance promised to Gerard, and as Helene saw the young man approaching her, her heart beat with apprehension at the thought of the promise exacted by Georgette. At the same time, she herself had a certain curiosity to bring about an explanation on his part.

She took his arm and ere long they were dancing lightly to the inspiring music. The flute and the French horn mingled their chords with the more lively notes of the stringed instruments; the couples glided softly, the silken robes rustled and the lovely flowers in the bouquets and coiffures filled the warm, luminous air with strong, sweet odors.

Helene and Gerard having danced their way through the ball-room, the gallery, and the wide hall, had reached the extreme end of the billiard-hall when Helene stopped brusquely.

"Are you fatigued," demanded Gerard.

"No; only a little oppressed; let us rest a moment."

At that very instant, Georgette glided before them in the arms of Marius, and although dancing, she gave Helene a significant glance from the corner of her eye.

"Mlle. Grandfief has the appearance of enjoying herself greatly," said Helene in a hesitating voice, "she is very lovely this evening."

Gerard made no reply.

"Do you not agree with me?" she continued with some insistence.

"She has a pretty complexion," he answered with an air of indifference.

"A pretty complexion! Now that is a poor compliment. She has such handsome eyes and beautiful hair."

"Not so beautiful as yours," interrupted Gerard as he looked admiringly at the flowing ringlets that fell over her white shoulders.

"And then," continued Helene, "she has natural dignity and that is a great merit; she is amiable and industrious; besides, she has a number of other good qualities."

"She possesses something that you have forgotten," he said with a slight show of impatience.

"And what is it?" asked Helene.

"A very devoted friend."

They looked into each other's eyes for a moment. Helene could not refrain from smiling, but she soon became grave again.

"You are very sarcastic. I know that it is bad taste to boast of such matters, but even if Georgette is your betrothed I think you carry your modesty a little too far!"

Gerard blushed. "My betrothed!" he exclaimed, "is it possible that you believe such a thing?"

"Everyone speaks of it, and your father does not deny it."

"Mlle. Grandfief is perhaps my betrothed in the dreams of my father, but she will never be in mine!"

He lowered his eyes and sighed, then added in a trembling voice:

"The betrothed of my heart, the one whom I love—is you!" and then, as if frightened at his own audacity, he grasped Helene's hand to continue the mazourka.

The young girl was as pale as a lily, but her brilliant eyes betrayed the joy in her heart.

"Helene," he murmured, intoxicated with the music and her loving glances, "Helene!—"

"Hush! Hush!" she whispered in a voice at once tender and imperious.

At the same time she pressed his hand gently.

The whole world disappeared from the eyes of the dazzled Gerard; he raised to his lips the little hand that trembled within his own. The room was empty, and no one could see them. He believed so at least, but the door of the billiard-hall opened opposite to the dressing-room, where little Reine, puzzled at their long stay in this solitary corner, stooped from time to time, to peep at the two young people. So that passionate kiss was caught on the wing by the little seamstress.

"You *must* not!" stammered Helene who had lost her usual sangfroid. She took several steps, marking the time of the mazourka, and drew her partner along with her.

"Let us profit by these last bars," she said, "for we will dance no more together this evening."

"I will dance with no one else," replied Gerard, as the orchestra played the last notes of the mazourka.

After Gerard left her, Helene stood for some time motionless in the middle of the hall, absorbed in the thrilling memory of what had just

passed between them. Suddenly she was startled by the light touch of a fan on her arm.

"Well!" whispered Georgette, "have you spoken to him about me?"

Helene started and bowed her head in the affirmative.

"You spoke well of me, I hope," continued Mlle. Grandfief.

"Yes. But—"

"What did he say?" she demanded eagerly.

Reflection was never a dominant characteristic in Helene's nature, and Georgette had come to question her when her mind was utterly upset. So the words escaped her lips before she realized what she was saying.

"He said that I was a very devoted friend."

By the astonished look of Mlle. Grandfief she comprehended that she had made a very foolish reply, and wishing to repair the mischief done, she stammered out an embarrassed explanation.

But it was too late.

"Ah!" cried the furious Georgette turning away from her, "this is funny, to say the least!"

Meanwhile, the hours flew by. On a settee in the billiard-hall young Anatole, made drowsy by the punch and the warmth of the rooms, had fallen fast asleep. The merry animation of the

dance was succeeded by the noisy tumult of supper. The tinkling of glasses, the clinking of the silver and the popping of champagne bottles mingled with the joyous laughter and the hum of voices. Above it all, one could hear the bright sallies of Marius. He had a place next to Georgette who dipped her rosy lips into the sparkling champagne and seemed entirely consoled for the indifference of Gerard. When the violins gave the signal for the cotillion she accepted the arm of the poet, and without heeding the commands of her mother, she danced again with the gay young man.

By degrees, the crowd diminished and the rumbling of wheels could be heard on the garden gravel. The carriage of Madame Laheyrd was announced; the wife of the Inspector beckoned to Helene and Marius, but Gerard approaching Helene, offered her his arm to conduct her to the dressing-room. After wrapping about her shoulders a light shawl, to protect her from the night air, he escorted her and Madame Laheyrd to the carriage.

"Au revoir!" cried Helene, as she sprang in lightly after her mother.

Marius closed the door and made a majestic bow.

"Proceed," said he to the coachman; "I will return on foot with my friend Gerard:

" 'Je veux baigner mon coeur dans le frais du matin,
Comme on trempe un biscuit dans du vieux chambertin.' "

It was four o'clock. In the east, above the vineyards, purple and rosy clouds announced the break of day, and one could already hear the song of the lark. Marius, his brain excited with wine, hummed a waltz as they wended their way homeward. Gerard trudged along by his side, his heart thrilling with ecstasy, his eyes fixed on the heavens.

"Brrr, it is chilly!" said Marius. "That little fête was charming; Mlle. Grandfief is an amiable girl, and the champagne of her father is a glorious wine!"

He then launched forth on the beauty of Georgette. This good fellow of a poet, who in his verses sang only of goddesses of marble whiteness and fawn-like eyes, was in reality singularly susceptible to the bourgeois charms of a ruddy complexion and a retroussé nose. "She is like a Rubens' portrait," he cried in praising the plump shoulders and rosy lips of Mlle. Grandfief. "Ah! my friend, although the hard metal of my heart has been gnawed by all the acids of life,

I felt this evening that the arrows of Eros could cause it to vibrate once more; I am in love!"

"You also!" said Gerard ingenuously.

"Myself—but pshaw! I will not reveal her name. Know only that she is as beautiful as the Graces, and that she has received the avowal of my love."

"What! Already?"

"Yes, you know I always have in my pocket original sonnets."

"You have read one of them to her!" demanded Gerard in surprise.

"Better than that! I have slipped one of them between her pretty fingers, and, *ma foi!* she quickly concealed it within her glove, and lowered her eyes like a frightened dove."

Gerard could not resist laughing when he pictured to himself the expression of this unknown inamorata when she would decipher the strange verses of the poetic Marius.

The poet himself burst out laughing, and the hills reverberated with the noisy hilarity of the two friends. The larks mounted gayly to the pearl-tinted clouds, and in the vineyard the thrush began to warble.

"How glorious!" cried Marius; "this delicious

air, the limpid sky and the songs of the birds make one very light-hearted indeed!"

And he hummed the air that Helene had sung:

"Mignonne, est-il rose qui fleure
Mieux que l'amour, l'amour au mois de mai?"

"Ah! my friend!" he said, pressing the hand of Marius who was astonished at the enthusiasm of the young man usually so reserved. "What a good thing it is to live, and how happy I am this morning!"

"I love to see you thus. Long life to youth!" cried Marius, throwing his hat into the air. "And to think that at this very moment lots of bald-headed, rheumatic bourgeois keep slothfully in their beds, slanderers of the morning dew! Stupid old men!"

He took Gerard's arm and the two, overflowing with health and youth, walked lightly toward the upper town, singing fragments of love songs and declaiming sentimental verses. When they arrived at the foot of the Palval terraces, Gerard drew from his pocket a pass-key, but Marius stopped him with a superb gesture.

"Why, my dear fellow," said he, "wilt thou enter prosaically by the door? Hast thou forgotten Romeo, the ball of the Willows, and thy

former squirrel-like nimbleness! Let us scale the terrace, my boy!"

"Willingly," said Gerard. At that moment he would have stormed the heavens to bring back a ray of the stars. They clambered up the espalier which cracked under their feet. When they attained the parapet the rising sun greeted them with its first rosy beams.

"And now, my son," said Marius, "let us embrace!"

"Let us embrace!" repeated Gerard as he pressed to his heart the brother of Helene.

Standing upon the wall they addressed a boisterous "good morning" to an early vine-dresser who looked up at them in affright; then the two, leaping the partition wall, disappeared at the same time behind the hedge of yoke elms in the gardens.



IX

Just as the sudden evaporation of ether produces intense cold, so is every unusual excitement of the brain followed by a reaction of calm and cooling reflection. In the moral and the physical order, the law is the same. Gerard de Seigneulles experienced this the morning after the ball at Salvanches, when he awoke from a restless sleep to find his room flooded with sunlight. His exaltation of the previous evening vanished like subtle smoke, leaving him alone with cold reason. He loved Helene, and he had avowed his love, but at the same time, in the eyes of his father and of the Grandfief family, he was betrothed to Georgette. He could not honorably continue to play this double role. His loyalty and his love for Mlle. Laheyraud commanded him to clear up matters with all possible speed; but on the other hand, he could not reflect without terror on the means he would have to employ

to extricate himself from this equivocal situation, and on the explosion of wrath with which the Chevalier de Seigneulles would receive the unwelcome *denouement*.

Meanwhile, he was impatient to see Helene again, and yet he did not wish to meet her until he was entirely free from Mlle. Grandfief.

He resolved to go to Salvanches on the morrow, and not to return until he had withdrawn all claims to the hand of Georgette. In order not to complicate matters, he would continue to dissimulate at home, not caring to confront the paternal wrath until he had bravely burned his bridges behind him.

When he found himself on his way to Salvanches, although he walked with decent deliberation, the trees on the avenue disappeared with astonishing rapidity.

He pictured to himself the scene in the Grandfief family circle; he imagined their questions, their responses, he could hear the solemn intonations of Madame Grandfief, and he foresaw that in her presence he would cut but a sorry figure.

At the gate when he had rung the bell, each sound went to his heart, and it was with a hesitating voice that he inquired of the servant if the ladies would receive him. Yes, the ladies

were working in their sitting-room and would see him there. In the vestibule he had a last quaking, but invoking the fair face of Helene, he recovered his courage and entered, determined to bring matters to a satisfactory finale.

Madame Grandfief was standing up assorting a pile of linen. Seated near a window before one of those beautiful spindles that we often see in the pictures by Chardin, and that our grandmothers called a *giroinde*, Mlle. Grandfief was winding a skein of silk. Madame Grandfief liked for her visitors to surprise her daughter engaged in these minor details of domestic life; it gave her a serious air, and made her appear housewifely.

After an exchange of commonplace greetings, Madame Grandfief took up her pile of linen and left the two young people *tete-a-tete*.

It seemed to her that Gerard was somewhat reserved, and imagining that her presence intimidated him, she resolved for the first time to leave him alone with her daughter; however, being a prudent mother, her ears burned to listen behind the door of the adjoining apartment.

Gerard was seated in an arm-chair pondering how he should broach the subject; Georgette continued to wind her thread, while through the

open window the jasmines thrust their tendrils into the room, almost touching with their sweet-scented blossoms the glossy braids of her black hair. At intervals they could hear the murmur of the Ornain as it flowed impetuously through the park. The silence was first broken by the young girl excusing herself for pursuing her work of spinning. Gerard expressed his astonishment at seeing her so industrious the day after a ball.

"I must occupy my time to the best of my ability," she said, "and I have not the resources of Mlle. Laheyraud." Gerard's behavior at the ball had grievously wounded the young lady's *amour propre*, and her present tone and manner showed it very plainly. The young man hastened to take advantage of this opportunity.

"I do not believe," he said, "that Mlle. Laheyraud is ever idle; indeed, she always seems to be busied."

"With her dresses, yes. It is true that is an all-important occupation. How did you like her costume at the ball?"

"Simple and in good taste."

"Simple, perhaps; that gauze dress did not cost her much; but as to being in good taste, that is not the general opinion."

"It is my opinion," said Gerard shortly.

"Ah!" said Georgette, spitefully, becoming more and more excited as she proceeded. "Since you are her friend, advise her never again to ornament her shoulders with butterflies."

"Mlle. Laheyward has no lessons in taste to learn from anyone; she is too much of a Parisian for that."

"And too much of a coquette to deprive herself of a single gewgaw that will attract attention."

The contest had begun. Bitter words darted like arrows. Beneath the medlar trees in the park the scolding voice of the rushing river, grew louder as if in harmony with the quarrel.

"She is beautiful enough," said Gerard finally, "to dispense with being a coquette."

"With what ardor you defend her!" cried Georgette, to whom jealousy had given spirit for the first time. "You are a very devoted friend."

"Mlle. Layherard could not be spoken of in any other terms by any of her friends."

"That reproach does not touch me. Mlle. Laheyward is not my friend, thank heaven! I am more select in my friendships."

"We place our heart as we choose," sharply replied Gerard; who was irritated in his turn. "As for me, I am very fond of her, and I will

not suffer her to be attacked in my presence."

This was the drop of bitterness that was destined to make the cup overflow. Georgette arose, her eyes flashing and her nostrils dilating.

"And you dare tell me this!" she cried. "Ah! it is too much!" She could say no more, her anger made her speechless, so she resorted to the last resource of women when pushed to an extremity and burst into tears.

Madame Grandfief who had watched the whole scene from behind the door, appeared suddenly on the threshold of the sitting-room.

"Sir," she cried, "your conduct is shameful! I regret bitterly having ever opened my door to you."

"Madame," said Gerard, taking his hat and bowing, "in the future you will have no occasion for such regrets."

He went out much incensed, yet his heart felt lighter as he breathed the warm air, walking rapidly in the direction of the upper town.

While Gerard executed his *coup d'état* at Salvanches, Francelin Finoël, finding it impossible to work in his office, resolved to make a visit to the Laheyrd house. He had, as yet, received only vague accounts of the Grandfief ball, for Reine Lecomte had not returned home since the

evening of the entertainment; they had kept her at Salvanches to aid in putting things in order, and she had also slept there. While climbing to the upper town, the little hunchback turned over in his mind his grand projects; his expressive face, more pale than usual, and his rapid gait, betrayed his feverish anxiety. He stopped before ascending the steps to the threshold, to wipe from his brow the cold perspiration.

A spectacle calculated to calm his nerves, awaited him in the garden, where the Laheyrrard family were assembled under the shade of the great mulberry tree. On a chafing dish there steamed a large copper-kettle full of boiling sirup, and on the ground near by were several baskets heaped up with golden plums, which Madame Laheyrrard, after having stoned them, dropped into great Dutch-ware plates, where they gave forth the delicious odor of ripe, crushed fruit. Tonton and Benjamin with faces smeared with preserves, viewed the preparations with greedy looks.

Helene, covered with a long white apron, her sleeves rolled up to the elbows, was standing over the kettle, stirring the contents with a long spoon, which she lifted from time to time, dripping with bright drops of sirup that sparkled in the

sunshine. When she saw Finoël, she cried:—

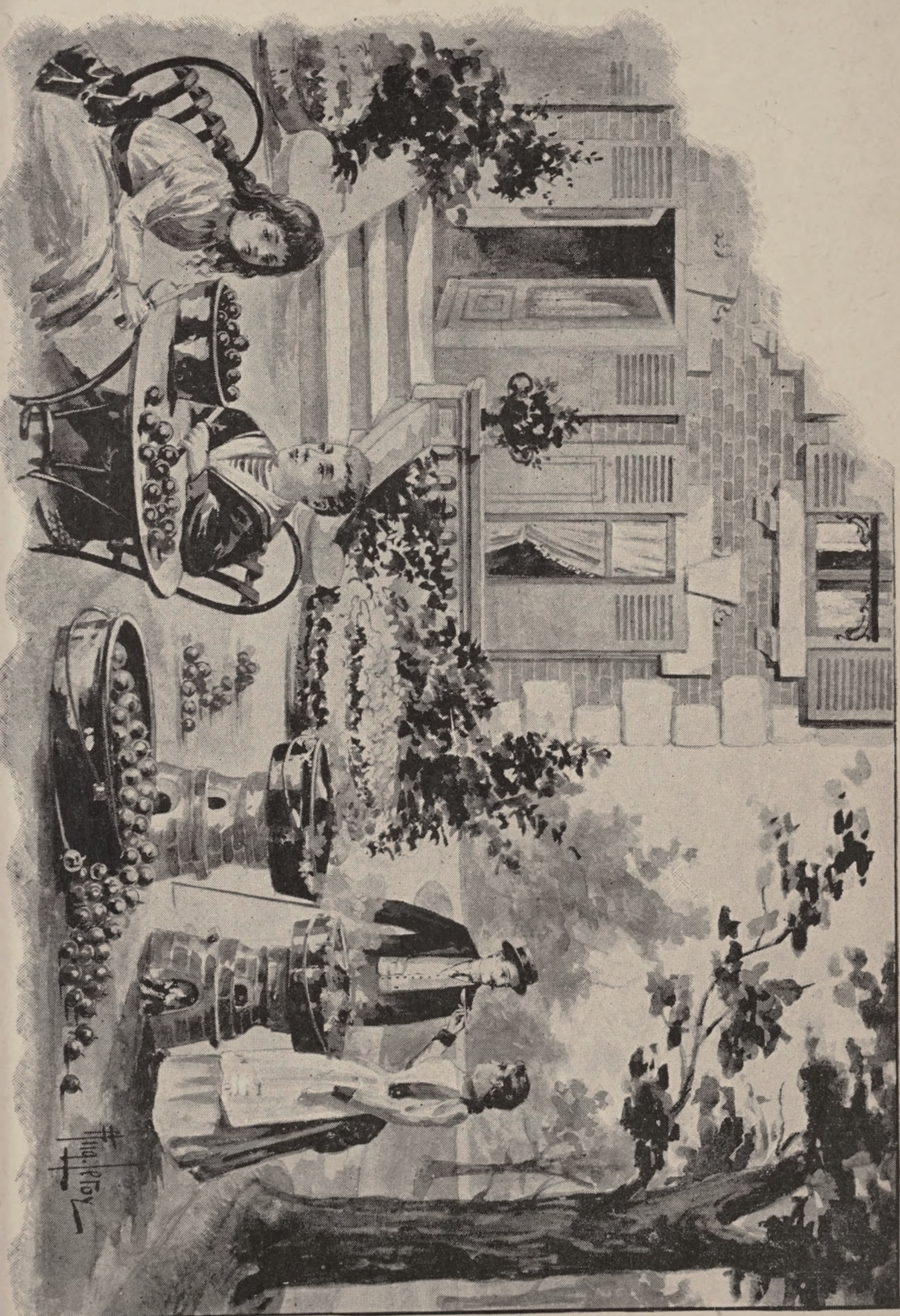
Come join us, and assist in the great work of making preserves. Who can ever say again that I am not a domestic young woman. Have you ever seen a better housemaiden than I?"

She was very animated; the heat from the chafing dish tinged her cheeks with a beautiful pink color; her laughing eyes and her whole countenance betrayed a secret joy. Francelin threw a discontented look at Madame Laheyraud and the children. He had counted upon finding Helene in her studio, and his disappointment increased his nervous disquietude. He marched up and down near the great kettle, without responding to the questioning of the children, watching with a bitter expression on his lips, the strange silhouette of his shadow on the sands of the garden walk.

"You enjoyed the ball?" he finally said to Helene.

"Immensely!" responded the young girl, pouring a bowlful of fruit into the boiling sirup, and stirring it with the long spoon. The air was full of the pleasant savory odor of plums which the children sniffed with open nostrils.

"This is delicious!" she cried, drinking in the odorous air. "By the way, I looked for you the



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other evening at the Grandfiefs'. Why did you not come?"

"It was impossible," answered Finoël, his face turning crimson.

To Helene alone, he would not have hesitated to tell the truth, but before Madame Laheyraud his pride would suffer too much by the humiliating confession. He lowered his eyes and with an embarrassed manner continued his promenading. His ambiguous answer did not deceive Helene, and when she saw his blush, she divined the true cause of his absence. When the preserves were cooked to a turn, she lifted the steaming kettle to the stone steps and said to Finoël:

"Come to the studio; I have some new music to show to you."

When they were alone she interpreted from his restless manner that there was something on his mind.

"Do you wish to speak to me about anything?" she said.

"Yes," he murmured. He walked up and down the room several times and then said:

"Do you recall a conversation we had here about ten days ago? You spoke of leaving Juvigny to become a teacher, and you promised

to take no serious step in the matter before consulting me. Have you decided to go?"

"I hardly know," she replied, blushing in her turn; "I must confess that I have thought but little about it recently. Have you heard of any advantageous situation?"

"No; but for ten days I have been forming in my mind a great resolution. My position at the Prefecture is now more substantial; my salary is increasing, and I am thinking of marrying."

He hesitated before Helene's looks of astonishment.

"You are surprised," he continued, "and, in fact, humble and ill-shaped as I am, the idea is a strange one. The young women of Juvigny, who judge by outward appearances only, would turn up their noses at a proposal from me. But it is not among them that I seek a wife. The woman of whom I dream must have an intellectual mind, her intelligent eyes must pierce this unpleasant exterior to find beneath those qualities that which goes to make a true man. I am ambitious; I have a soul that aspires to an exalted position, and I possess the strength of will necessary to grasp them. These are the guarantees of happiness that I have to offer to the woman I wish to marry."

As he spoke, Helene, seated at the piano, opened her eyes wider and wider. She began to comprehend the drift of his words and she trembled lest he should discover that she divined it. Her looks expressed at the same time a painful apprehension and a sweet pity. Finoël continued, lowering his look and walking up and down the floor:

"That intellectual woman, with her tender heart and her great courageous soul exists; a happy chance has thrown me in her way, and it is in her presence to-day, that I am pouring out my soul—"

He stopped in front of Helene, gazing at her passionately.

"Would you be ashamed to have me for your husband, Helene?"

This time he had spoken clearly, and it was necessary to answer.

"I?" she cried, trembling painfully.

"Have I deceived myself?" he replied with an infinite bitterness in his voice; "have you not welcomed me in spite of my humble birth? have you not confided to me your dreams, your hopes your troubles, as one does to a dear friend?"

"Yes; as to a companion of my hours of solitude and *ennui*."

"As to one you would wish to be the companion of your whole life?" he demanded eagerly.

"Of my whole life!" cried Helene; "no, I have never had such a thought."

He bit his lips and replied fiercely: "Have you never reflected that perhaps my sentiments for you might lead me to this? When you spoke to me sweetly, when you sang to me, when you pressed my hand, did you never dream that such familiarity might arouse in me the wildest hopes, and give me almost a kind of right?"

"A right!" she cried out vehemently; "you have indeed singularly misunderstood me, Monsieur, for I never did love you."

He stood there, silently looking at her, with his large eyes full of reproach. Fearing that she had been too abrupt, she added in a gentle voice:

"If my thoughtlessness and familiarity have caused you to mistake for love that which was only an affectionate *camaraderie*, I regret it from the depths of my heart, and humbly ask your pardon."

Her heart was really moved with compassion, and tears glistened in her eyes; but Finoël was too much occupied with himself to notice them; his pride had been wounded to the quick. "I am not altogether surprised at your answer," he said

at last. "During the last ten days, something has happened to change your heart and turn your thoughts elsewhere; I will not have to seek very far to solve the mystery."

"You have provoked me at last," exclaimed Helene, irritated at Finoël's persistence; "I do not understand you, but I wish to hear nothing more about the whole thing."

She started toward the door, but the hunchback placed himself before her and barred the way.

"You shall hear me to the end," he said, his eyes flashing with anger. "I am not duped, and I well know that you prefer the name of Seigneulles to that of Finoël! But if I am not mistaken you had better take care, or you will be cruelly deceived in your turn. The handsome Gerard will only compromise you; that is what the people of the town predict."

"You are becoming insolent," cried Helene. A flush of anger mounted to her brow, her lips grew pale, and her eyes filled with indignation. She seized the hat which Finoël had laid upon a table and thrusting it into his hands, made the hunchback recoil before her glances of scorn.

She opened wide the door of the vestibule.

"Adieu," she said in a constrained voice, and

as Finoël remained, disconcerted and motionless, she stamped her foot angrily, and pointing to the door, she commanded: "Leave me, instantly!"

He darted furiously from the house, so blinded with exasperation that he rushed violently against his rival who was walking the Rue du Tribel. Finoël threw upon him an envenomed glance that made Gerard experience a sudden sensation of uneasiness, similar to that caused by the cold, magnetic gaze of a rattlesnake.

The rain was beginning to fall; the hunchback removed his hat, so that the fresh drops of water might cool his burning head. He entered his poor chamber, and then gave vent to his rage and hatred. His sickly features were contracted and in his shriveled fingers he twisted nervously a lock of his straight black hair.

And so, twice in one week had his pride been terribly wounded; first by the refusal of an invitation to Salvanches, and finally by the cruel disdain of Helene Laheyraud—two painful shocks that had suddenly cast him to the bottom of that hill of success his vaulting ambition had assisted him to climb.

All must now be begun anew, and he felt oppressed and feverish with discouragement. Within his heart there raged a storm of rancor and hate;

and as if to echo his despair, the wind sobbed among the trees in the garden of the old college, and the rain pattered on the roofs and overflowed in the gutters. Amid the routing of his better thoughts, there came to him as in a vision of a paradise lost, the blonde, seductive image of Helene, and near her the triumphant face of Gerard de Seigneulles. His rage redoubled, and striking the table with his fist he cried aloud:

"Oh! I will have my revenge! I will have my revenge!"

A slight noise made him turn his head, and he perceived Reine Lecomte standing right upon the door-sill. She had returned from Salvanches, and running in to relate what had happened at the ball, she had pushed her way into Finoël's room.

Hearing his exclamation and noticing his distorted features, she supposed he already knew the details of the soirée, and so assumed at once a look and tone of condolence.

"Well, now! my poor Francelin," she said, "was I not right when I told you to beware of that Parisian? So you know what happened at the ball?"

"What happened?" he queried angrily.

"Ah! you know nothing—it is the talk of the

town, already. Mlle. Laheyward and M. Gerard de Seigneulles did not leave each other during the whole evening, and I saw him myself tenderly kiss her hand."

She then narrated to him the scene in the billiard-hall.

"Everybody is talking of it," she continued, "and I am sure that the marriage with Mlle. Grandfief has fallen to the ground. And they are ridiculing you, Francelin, for you have only served as a screen to conceal the sport of the lovers."

Finoël bit his lips, and his eyes flashed.

"But patience," continued little Reine, "papa Seigneulles is not pleasant-tempered every day, and he shall make a great fuss when he hears the news; so you see the Parisian is not at the end of her troubles."

"Do you really believe that he will keep his son from marrying her?"

"I am sure of it, and if you will only listen to me—Francelin, you know I am a good-hearted girl, and I have never borne you a grudge for your rudeness to me. So let us be friends."

She held out her hand, and almost by force seized the long, lean fingers of Finoël, who looked at her with anxious, questioning eyes.



"Let us once more be good friends," she repeated pressing his hand, "and I will assist you in your revenge."

X

When Gerard returned from Salvanches he was informed by Manette that the Chevalier had departed for the Grange-Allard.

About three leagues from Juvigny in the depths of the forest of Grand-Juré, M. de Seigneulles had a beautiful farm that he cherished as the apple of his eye. He often spent whole weeks there, lodging in a garret scantily furnished, eating with the farmers, and not disdaining, himself, to push the plow, or brandish the flail. This time he had gone to supervise the threshing of his wheat, and he counted upon spending eight days there.

On receiving this information Gerard experienced a sense of relief. His quarrel with the Grandfiefs had exhausted his courage, and he was not sorry to enjoy a week's respite before braving the storm of paternal wrath. As soon as he had dined, he hastened to see Helene, whom he found alone in the studio.

She had not recovered from the agitation caused her by the visit of Francelin Finoël, and she silently pressed Gerard's hand. "I have just come from Salvanches," he began, "and I have accomplished what I wished. Now the coast is clear, for I shall never again put my foot into the Grandfief house. My heart is free, Helene, and I offer it to you entirely."

She put her finger on her lips. "Hush!" she said smiling; "but have you spoken to your father?"

"Not yet," he answered a little embarrassed; "he has just left for Grange-Allard, but he shall be apprised of everything as soon as he returns."

There was a moment of silence and a slight cloud passed over the face of the young girl.

"It seems to me," she said, "that you have begun at the wrong end; it was to M. de Seigneulles that you should have spoken first."

"Do not scold me," he said, with the air of a suppliant; "that hour spent at Salvanches has left my nerves in a pitiable state. Play me a tune from Mozart to soothe them."

She seated herself at the piano and began a sonata, and Gerard watched her by the trembling light of the wax candles that flickered in the

breeze blowing from the garden. Her golden ringlets, the spirituelle outline of her profile, her white hands flashing on the ivory keys, the soft sweep of her light brown lashes on the velvety cheek—nothing escaped him.

The murmur of the wind in the garden-trees was like a low sweet melody, a soft undertone in harmony with the clear notes of the piano. The corner where they sat was brightly lighted, but the rest of the studio was plunged into mysterious shadows that added to the charm of the *tete-a-tete*, and increased its intimacy. They passed two hours thus, scarcely speaking. They were listening to the new song of love in their hearts, so sweetly in unison with the music of Mozart, and they were lost to all else. As for Gerard, that love bursting so miraculously into flower, made every moment more delicious. He had so long been deprived of any tenderness, so long tormented with confused desires, that this passion now took possession of his whole being—his heart and soul, his brain, his body. Like the tumultuous fermentation of wine in a vat, there was perhaps more of foam than liquor, more of bubbles than of strength. He loved Helene with the fiery ardor of his twenty-three years, adoring all of her—her spir-

ited intelligence, the smile on her beautiful lips, the lovely depths of her brown eyes, and the goodness of her heart.

Helene, on her side, was attracted to him by a secret influence that bound together the opposing elements of their natures.

This Parisian girl, born among skeptics, elegant and frivolous, was drawn to Gerard by the very qualities that were opposed to her Parisian education—that robust faith, that naive admiration, the fresh enthusiasm which is to the soul what the flower is to the fruit.

Strange to say, owing perhaps to the mysterious influence of blood and race, Gerard, in the bourgeois society of this little town, still had the courtly manners of a nobleman and all the delicacy of a cultivated intelligence. So Helene loved him, as she knew how to love, with all the vehemence of an impetuous nature, and the strength of a pure and ardent heart.

For a whole week they enjoyed their bliss without a cloud to darken it. They forgot the rest of the world; their feet no longer touched the earth, and giving themselves up entirely to the joy of loving, they committed imprudences, innocent enough in themselves, but which the gossips of a small town could not overlook. Accompanied

by the two children, Benjamin and Tonton, they went outside the gates of the vineyard, crossing the fields and meadows to find suitable landscapes for Helene to sketch.

Madame Laheyraud, who already saw her daughter married to young Seigneulles, opposed in no way these adventurous and unconventional rambles.

She had never watched over Helene with anything like scrupulous care, and the prospect of a noble marriage intoxicated her vanity to such an extent that she never dreamed of playing the role of mentor. She cherished the most ambitious hopes, and built on that future union the scaffolding of a *chateau en Espagne*. She lost what prudence she ever possessed, and with her usual intemperance of speech she could not refrain, when at the house of the tradesmen and gossips in the neighborhood, from hazarding transparent hints of a time, not far distant, when Helene would be addressed as Madame de Seigneulles.

The imprudence of the two young people, and Madame Laheyraud's want of tact, were commented upon and exaggerated with that amiable charity that is in the hearts of people in general, and of people in small towns in particular. In a few days there was hardly a house in Juvigny where

some spicy detail could not be obtained in regard to the love affair of Helene and Gerard. The news made the tour of the town, wending its way along the ruins, that side of the great city clock; circulating through the quiet streets of the upper town; then redescending towards the gardens of Palval to lose itself in the frothing soap-suds of the wash-houses on the Ornain. Of course, the lovers were blissfully ignorant of the rumors that were thus agitating the town. Lovers live in a strange atmosphere; their tenderness infolds them in a luminous fluid which reveals them, but which at the same time, isolates them, and renders them like that ocean bird that swims enveloped in globules of air, and floats through the torrents of waters like a diver under his bell. Helene and Gerard did not give one thought to the fragility of their happiness until the return of M. de Seigneulles was announced.

"My father will arrive to-morrow morning," said Gerard one evening, "and I will speak to him as soon as he comes."

"I shall think of you while you are on the rack," answered Helene. She tried to smile, but she trembled inwardly at the thought that her destiny was to be placed into the hands of the terrible Chevalier. "You must return to me at dusk and tell me all."

The next morning M. de Seigneulles, after a frugal breakfast at Grange-Allard, mounted Bruno and rode leisurely through the woods of Juré. He was well satisfied; all the crops were gathered and in the barns; the grapes were beginning to turn purple, and promised a splendid vintage. While riding along, he was saying to himself that the courtship of Gerard and Mlle. Grandfief ought by this time to have reached the same stage as the vines, and he planned to have the marriage take place before All-Saints day. On his arrival home, after confiding Bruno to Baptiste he entered the kitchen where Manette handed him two letters brought that morning by the postman. The first one was a very laconic epistle from Madame Grandfief.

She announced coldly that she would have to withdraw her promise and renounce all idea of an alliance between Gerard and her daughter, as the two young people were wholly unsuited for each other.

The second letter, written in an unfamiliar hand was unsigned, and couched in these terms:

"Charitable friends consider it a duty to warn M. de Seigneulles of the compromising attentions of his son to Mlle. Laheyward. We know that the young men of this day and generation love to

boast of their flirtations with penniless girls. *Ce sont là jeux de princes*: but if M. de Seigneuelles has not become completely blinded he will put a stop to an intimacy that scandalizes the town and gives one a sad opinion of the manners of young people *well-reared*."

The ancient guardsman swore an oath that shook the panes of glass in the kitchen windows.

"Where is my son?" he exclaimed.

Gerard had left the house before breakfast, and Manette thought surely he had gone to meet Monsieur. Without listening longer to her verbose explanations, M. de Seigneuelles, with his gaiters on, and covered with dust, walked briskly to the house of the Abbé Valland. He found him trudging leisurely under the elm-trees reading his breviary.

"Did you know of my return?" he said excitedly, barring the way of the Abbé.

Seeing the angry expression of the Chevalier, his disordered toilet and his eagle nose pinched with rage, M. Valland demanded in his turn:

"Is Grange-Allard on fire?"

"Sangrebleu! Worse than that. The marriage of Gerard is broken off!"

The Curé rubbed the glasses of his spectacles with great care and deliberation.

"That is not all," continued the Chevalier. "My son has been inveigled by those Laheyrards, enticed into their house; and he is foolishly in love with that girl, a most scatter-brained creature—"

The Abbé brushed off an almost invisible particle of dust from his sleeve.

"Yes," he finally answered with a sigh; "I have already had wind of that grievous affair, and I certainly intend to speak to Madame Laheyrard, but it is necessary to discuss the matter discreetly and with wise circumspection, to prevent scandal."

"A pest on circumspection!" growled M. de Seigneulles; "must one put on gloves to handle two young scape-graces who have brought confusion into three families? What are we coming to and why do we no longer live in the time when, with a simple *lettre de cachet* one might thrust a disobedient son into a dungeon, and a giddy girl behind the iron gates of a convent! But I am able to defend myself and mine, and I am going to speak my mind to those intriguing women!"

"Good Heavens!" cried the Abbé, "do not make such a disturbance, my friend! Helene is my godchild, and you had far better leave me to

manage this affair and to reprimand the young girl. I promise you that I will go to see the ladies to-day, as soon as I have finished my breviary."

M. de Seigneulles lowered his head. At heart he was not sorry that the Curé had taken upon himself the unpleasant mission.

"So be it!" he said; "for you will speak without anger, and that will be better. But impress this upon them—that I forbid them receiving Gerard; and that if my son disobeys me in that respect, they must shut the door in his face. Meanwhile, I am going to see my young scamp, and will soon silence all this idle talk."

XI

M. de Seigneulles, taking a brusque leave of the Abbé, returned home, ascended to his chamber and took a seat near the window, not so much to dissipate the fumes of his wrath as to ruminate upon the most suitable punishment for the culprit. The window opened upon the gardens, and under his neighbor's elm-trees he perceived a young girl in the full flower and beauty of eighteen summers. By her flowing blonde ringlets he recognized Mlle. Laheyward.

"There," thought he, "is the dangerous creature who has ensnared Gerard!"

Helene moved gracefully among the flowers, bending her neck to smell a rose, or stooping to pluck a sprig of mignonette. In spite of his anger the old Chevalier could not help being affected by such loveliness. He watched her as if fascinated, following with his eyes every move of her supple form. Suddenly she turned and ran

lightly to meet M. Laheyraud who was descending the walk, his nose buried in a book.

With a bewitching gesture, she seized the volume that absorbed the attention of the old savant, and concealed it in her pocket; then placing her hands on his shoulders, she kissed him on each cheek, and taking his arm she began walking gayly by his side, making him admire the flowers, and bringing a bright and contented smile to his grave countenance.

The father and daughter seemed to love each other devotedly, for their manner revealed a warm and tender affection. Those loving demonstrations, that sweet familiarity, brought a sigh to the lips of M. de Seigneulles. He had never known such relations, having always inspired more fear than love. That made him only more envious; those affectionate caresses which the young girl lavished upon her father, and that tenderness, awakened within his heart slumbering emotions. Not wishing to succumb to such mollifying influences, he brusquely closed the window.

At that moment Gerard entered the room, somewhat pale, but with a happy countenance.

"Ah! you are here then!" exclaimed M. de Seigneulles, his angry passions rekindled; "I have

just heard an astounding piece of news! Explain to me your conduct toward Mlle. Grandfief and this unexpected falling out, of which I have just been informed."

"I counted upon telling you of it myself, and I regret that it was impossible for me to do so first," said Gerard, lowering his eyes before the irritated glances of his father. "I have ceased my visits to Salvanches because I do not love Mlle. Grandfief."

"Indeed!—and perhaps your heart is bestowed elsewhere; is it not so? I know in advance all the folly you would relate to me; but since you had that whim in your head, why did you act so hypocritically at Salvanches, at the risk of making me play the role of Cassander in an honorable family?"

"Pardon me, sir; when I followed you into the Grandfief house, my heart was free. I believe that I acted honorably when I disengaged myself as soon as I felt that I loved another."

"Yes, an *intrigante* whom you have followed like a bird to a snare. And now what is it you propose to do?"

"To marry Mlle. Laheyrd after obtaining your consent."

"And if I refuse?"

"I shall wait."

"You will wait! What!" cried M. de Seigneulles, furious. "Until you are twenty-five years of age when you can send me legal summons? Am I dreaming? Are you bereft of all religion—of all respect for parental authority? Summons to me! Have you then become so poisoned with revolutionary gangrene that you have lost all regard for yourself and others?"

For the first time Gerard dared to lift his eyes to his father.

"I have said that I would wait," he replied in a firm voice, "because I know that you are a just man. Seeing my patience and respectful persistence you will be convinced that it is a serious affection; and you will not break two hearts that wish only to love you."

"Sentimental gush, nothing more! No, sir, you shall not put my patience to the test, and I will never consent to such a foolish marriage. If my ways are not agreeable to you, you may leave my house instantly. I will give you your portion, and you may live far away from me like a prodigal son."

The Chevalier stopped in the middle of his harangue, fearing that he would be taken at his word; his natural sense of propriety, and the Lorraine prudence reappeared.

"Morbleu!" he cried, "and if you resort to that extremity, you will take with you my solemn malediction!"

Gerard had become very pale, and was so agitated that he could not speak.

"I give you one month to reflect," added the Chevalier hastily; "but as I do not love scandals, you must make your reflections elsewhere than at Juvigny."

He raised the window violently, and called out to Baptiste to harness Bruno to the dog-cart. Then turning to his son, he said:

"Baptiste will drive you immediately to Grange-Allard, where you will have the pleasure of spending several weeks; there you may be able to cool down to the proper degree."

At the thought of leaving before seeing Helene, who was even then awaiting him, his whole soul revolted; his eyes sparkled with tears of indignation, but it was not in vain that he had passed six years at the college of the Jesuits at Metz. He had breathed there an atmosphere impregnated with discreet reserve and silent capitulations, and he had involuntarily acquired the habit of submission, wherein the body was more concerned than the mind.

"Very well, sir," he replied, bowing, "I will obey you."

"Go, make your preparations," said the inflexible Chevalier, "for you start in a half-hour."

In just thirty minutes, Bruno, vigorously lashed by the taciturn Baptiste, was trotting briskly along the road to Grange-Allard; but when they were in sight of the forest of Juré, Gerard brusquely took the reins into his own hands, and suddenly brought the vehicle to a stand-still.

Then springing out onto the road, he said to Baptiste:

"You go on in the direction of the farm. As for me, I have business at Juvigny, and I must return there."

"Monsieur Gerard!" cried the frightened Baptiste, "this is not right! You will be the cause of the Chevalier discharging me."

"My father will never know of it and I promise you to be at the farm before midnight," said the young man imperiously.

He turned on his heels and entered the woods, leaving the paternal vehicle trotting solemnly along in the direction of Grange-Allard.

Gerard had felt all along that he must see Helene that very day, to tell her of the sad issue of his interview with his father and to swear to her that his heart would never change. He wandered about in the thickets till nearly dusk, but as

soon as the twilight had overshadowed the vineyards of Juvigny, he descended rapidly toward Palval, and entered the garden of the Laheyrards by the gate of the vineyard. A light that blazed through a window on the lower floor increased his courage, and he walked along cautiously behind the hedge of elm-trees.

In the studio, near the lamp, Helene sat with reddened eyes and a sad face, her head leaning on her hands, her elbows on the table. She was not alone. Madame Laheyrard was pacing the floor; her animated gestures and the irritated accents of her voice indicated that her nerves had been upset by disagreeable news.

"Did you ever hear of anything like it!" she exclaimed; "the idea of his sending me such a message by the Abbé Valland! As if I did not know how to take care of my daughter! Oh! the insufferable people of this miserable town!"

Just then Gerard appeared in the embrasure of the window which opened to the floor. Helene uttered a cry of surprise, but the indignation of Madame Laheyrard increased when she perceived him. With an air of affected dignity and with ill-concealed spite, she advanced toward the young man who stammered his embarrassed excuses.

"Monsieur de Seigneulles," she said, "you would oblige me, when you enter my house, by using the street-door like everyone else, and you will please me by never entering it any way. I find that your father accuses me of enticing you into my house. Why should he think that I wish to monopolize you? That's indeed very presumptuous on his part. If he will only attend to his son, I will take care of my daughter. I forbid Helene receiving you hereafter—"

After many vain attempts to interrupt this flow of words, Gerard was about to reply, when Helene, with a look of tender entreaty, made him a sign to withdraw. Returning her look with one full of passionate love, he bowed silently and left the room, redescending the steps into the garden, while Madame Laheyrd closed brusquely behind him the glass door.

XII

Gerard, stunned like a man who has received a violent blow on the head, staggered along the broad garden walk. Although unable to collect his thoughts, he felt a confused sense of complete disaster.

Reaching the vineyard gate, he stopped a moment to inhale the perfume of the roses and mignonette that he loved so well, and then descending the vineyard slope, he trudged along until he had climbed to the summit of the hill opposite the town. Leaning against a heap of moss-covered stones, he contemplated, with a mournful air, the row of ancient houses of the upper town. In the distance, between the orchard boughs, the light from Helene's studio greeted him as if with a melancholy adieu. His throat contracted, his eyes grew moist, and a sob issued from his lips. It was his first great grief. Compared with this sudden misfortune, the

troubles of his student life, and the ennui of his solitary youth appeared to him no worse than the unpleasant prickings of a pin.

The clock struck ten. He remembered his promise to Baptiste and hastened into the forest. Darkness imparted to the woods a strange and peculiar physiognomy.

During the day, when traversed by the rays of the sun, ringing with songs of birds and cheerful with the hum of human voices, those lofty trees seemed to confound themselves with all these things; but when abandoned to the silence and darkness of night, all was changed.

In their deep shadows, a thousand noises, imperceptible in the luminous hours of the day, became distinct, and one could hear the shivering of the trembling, nervous leaves, the rustling of the ferns straightening their delicate fronds refreshed by the dewdrops, the muffled sound of the acorn falling to the mossy earth, and the feeble murmur of the tiny rivulet, filtering, drop by drop, among the roots—all of these voices uniting in one deep, penetrating harmony.

As Gerard hurried on through the forest, the image of Helene never left him; in his memory were revived every word, every gesture, every varying expression of her mobile, spiritual face.

The sighing of the wind through the pines recalled to him the music of the ball at Salvanches, and he could see her turning lightly under the brilliant light of the chandeliers, her eyes aglow, her lips smiling, and her tasteful gown clinging to her exquisite form; or, seated at the piano singing in her clear, bird-like voice the song of the *Ramiers*:

“Dans les chemins creux,
Leur chanson vagabonde
Semble la voix profonde
Des printemps amoureux.

Tout le long du jour,
Sous les feuilles nouvelles.
Viens, parlons d’amour,
Au chant des tourterelles.

D’aimer et d’être aimé
Voici l’heure.
Contre mon cœur charmé
Ah! demeure.

Mignonne, est-il rose qui fleurit
Mieux que l’amour, l’amour au mois de mai?”

Alas! that night, in the depth of the forest, it was not the amorous voice of the ring-dove that resounded; only the funereal plaint of the owl, rising at intervals like the despairing appeal of a lost child, echoing from tree to tree, then losing itself in the receding gloom of the forest.

As he crossed the dismal path, the little crickets in the herbs chirped shrilly, suddenly breaking the silence, and Gerard imagined that he could hear the voice of his vanishing happiness crying out behind him: "I shall never return; Never! Never!"

He pressed onward; the darkness oppressed him, and ere long he saw, shining beyond the trees and hedges, in the light of the rising moon, the roofs of cottages vaguely defined against the sky, and the sonorous barking of the dogs reverberated in the woods.

"Is that you, Monsieur Gerard?" suddenly cried out an anxious voice.

Gerard started, but soon recognized the taciturn Baptiste, standing sentinel in front of the farm stables.

"The Chevalier has not seen you, I hope," he continued, "otherwise he will rate me soundly, for I should have been on my way back three hours ago. Good night!"

Gerard gained his chamber by feeling his way in the dark; then went to bed, but did not fall asleep until nearly daybreak. He awoke at ten o'clock next morning with the confused sensation of a heavy load pressing on his heart and brain. He rubbed his eyes, hardly knowing

where he was, but from his surroundings he soon realized that he was at Grange-Allard, and then he comprehended the anguish that filled his breast.

The hours of the first day of his exile dragged along as heavy as lead, and toward evening, no longer able to stand it, he walked two leagues through the woods to contemplate from afar the spire of Saint-Etienne, and the grove of Paquis, returning at dusk weary and depressed, going to bed without his supper.

The next day, the same programme. The third day, early in the morning, he buckled on his gaiters and following a beaten path he gained a plateau of vines facing the gardens of the upper town. He climbed a wild pear-tree and armed with a field-glass, from this improvised observatory he explored the surrounding country. A line of purple shadows marked the site of the gorge of Palval, then the ground rose almost to the verdant slopes that formed the garden terraces of upper Juvigny. There, amid the trees, he could see the ancient houses of the Rue du Tribel, with their trellises, their arbors garlanded with clematis; and there gray facades pierced with windows glared with tiny panes.

He could even distinguish the colors in the

masses of dahlias, and the undulations of the curtains fluttering through the open windows. He could see distinctly the house of the Inspector, and he could not take his eyes from it. It was midday; the bell of Saint-Etienne slowly sounded the Angelus; then the great bell of the clock announced the dinner hour to the workmen at the factories. A white form suddenly appeared on the stone steps near the mulberry tree in the Laheyward garden.

The young man's heart beat wildly and the glasses trembled in his hand. Soon the two children appeared, then Marius Laheyward. The white apparition slowly descended the flight of steps, the others followed, and they all disappeared behind the fruit trees.

Gerard's face became sorrowful, but before he had time to wipe the glasses of the lorgnette the four figures reappeared at the gate of the vineyard. It was certainly Helene; he could see distinctly her straw hat trimmed with cherry ribbon, her box of paints carried by Marius, and the great nets with which to ensnare butterflies, brandished by Tonton and Benjamin. Without a doubt she was going to paint in the country. The little party took the path lead-

ing from the vineyards and soon disappeared anew into the depths of Palval.

Gerard remained in the tree, waiting; he had a presentiment that this was not the end. In about a quarter of an hour, he saw emerging from the vine branches far below him, first the butterfly nets; then the broad felt hat of Marius; then a bright dress of ecru linen.

They climbed through the vines to reach the forest in the direction of a very picturesque valley, known in the country as *Fond d'Enfer*. Gerard remembered that Helene had often expressed a desire to paint a study, near a patriarchal beech-tree that threw its great shadow over the bottom of the valley, and whose powerful roots were watered by a limpid stream. He had a violent desire to meet the young girl as soon as possible, and he decided to profit by this favorable opportunity. He slipped down to the foot of the tree and started in the direction of the valley, threading his way slowly, with the minute precautions of a Mohican who creeps through the virgin forest.

He was not mistaken, for Mlle. Laheyraud and her party followed the winding path that ran like a green ribbon almost to the heart of the valley. When they reached the banks of the stream, Marius deposited the box of paints and the folding

chair at the foot of the ancient beech, then wiped his brow.

"Now then," he said, "au revoir; amuse yourself, for I intend to push on nearly to Savonnière in order to compose at my ease a sonnet in honor of the incomparable Beauty who has wounded my heart. For," continued he, observing a smile on the lips of Helene, "I am terribly smitten with love, and I pray that the helpful stars may soften the rigors of a barbarous father, and soon shine on the day that will unite our destinies."

He withdrew, declaiming in a resounding voice, these XV. century verses by Théophile de Viau:

Ce jour sera filê de soie,
Le soleil partout où j'irai
Laissera quand je passerai
Des ombrages dessus ma voie;
Les dieux, â mon sort complaisants,
Me combleront de leurs présents,
J'aurai tout mon soul d'ambroisie.

The children, following the course of the stream, chased the great butterflies, *nacres* and *vulcains*, that floated under the branches of the beech trees. After dipping her fingers into the water and untying her hat, Helene sat down before her canvas and prepared her palette.

For a long time she remained thoughtful, her large eyes fixed on space. Yet the landscape was all that an artist could desire. Deep and broad, the valley widened gently its woody side whereon all the colors of the foliage, from the metallic green of the oak to the pale green of the willows, mingled harmoniously. One side of the valley was plunged in purple shadows; a single ray of sunlight penetrating the thick foliage of the great beech, like a silvery vapor, made the somber mirror of the stream sparkle with a thousand luminous drops. The opposite side, on the contrary, was brilliantly illuminated; beyond a curtain of willows one could see gleaming, a corner of the winding road, a bit of meadow, and a row of shivering poplars. The only sounds to break the silence of that solitude were the flute-like sighs of the streamlet, and the laughter of the children, growing fainter and fainter in the distance.

Helene, her brush in her hand, continued her musings, and her face, so spiritually gay when animated, had at that moment an expression of mournful sadness. Although striving to obliterate the persistent image that haunted her thoughts, she dreamed only of Gerard.

Since her lover's abrupt leave-taking, she had

sworn a hundred times to forget that foolish fortnight and to become once more a reasonable girl. She would say to herself that Gerard was too young, and M. de Seigneulles too proud, and that, after all, it was nothing more than a passing flirtation. Still the thought of him continued to fill her mind, intruding itself each day more despotically. That night, at the ball, Helene had given him her heart, and she felt that it would make him suffer too much to take it back again. She drew a little stifled sigh and tossed back her long blonde ringlets; her melancholy eyes suddenly assumed the crystal depths of the waters of the rivulet, and a tear rolled down her cheek. She wiped it away with an impatient gesture, then seizing her palette she began to work resolutely.

As she was trying to reproduce upon the canvas the various hues of the foliage, the noise of branches stirring close to her made her turn her head. She uttered a cry and turned very pale; there was Gerard standing before her.

"You are surprised to see me?" he said.

She shook her head and a smile flashed from her lips to her moist eyes. He advanced and knelt at her feet on the mossy ground.

"Do not scold me," he said, with the air of a school-boy taken in fault.

"No, I will not scold you," she replied softly. "Why should I not tell you the truth? I was thinking of you."

"Truly?"

"I was so sorry to have you leave me the other evening without one word of excuse or consolation! You must not be offended with my mother; Abbé Valland's lecture excited her so much! but she is a good woman at heart, even though her tongue moves too quickly."

"Oh!" he said, charmed, "I am not offended with her; I am only suffering at being condemned to see you no more."

"And now that you have seen me you must go away quickly. What would they say if they surprised you here? It would be enough to make the tower of the clock fall over backward, and to cause M. de Seigneulles to lose his mind."

"You know," sighed Gerard, "that I am in exile at the farm?"

Helene could not refrain from laughing.

"On bread and water perhaps! What a man your father is! He makes me tremble."

Gerard talked on, and made no movement to go. Helene turned her head half-way, towards the place where he was kneeling.

"Go," she said, holding out her hand to him. "Adieu!"

He pressed her fingers and held them imprisoned tenderly within his own. For a moment they looked into each other's eyes, and then she brusquely withdrew her hand.

"You must leave me," she said in a voice less firm.

"Not yet," he entreated; "let me first tell you how much I love you."

Helene's eyes became very serious as she looked into the earnest blue eyes of Gerard.

"In my turn," she said, "I will ask you if you are speaking truly?"

And as Gerard hastened to assure her of his sincerity, she placed her hand gently on his shoulder.

"Listen," she said, "I am not like the other young girls of Juvigny; I have not been taught from my cradle to weigh my words to see if they are always proper and conventional. I speak as I think, and act as I speak, impulsively and sincerely. Are you sure, in the depths of your heart, that you love me? If you tell me that you do, I will believe you; but do not speak thoughtlessly, for if you should deceive me I would suffer greatly."

"I love you, I love you!" he repeated passionately; "and my life belongs to you."

She lowered her head. "Tell me," she said, "all

that has happened to you since our last evening together."

Gerard then related to her his sufferings, while she worked, a little nervously, on her sketch.

It was so pleasant there in the shady solitude. Blue and brown libellulas fluttered about the aquatic herbs, and the perfume of the meadow-sweet embalmed the air. But the moments flew more swiftly than the libellulas—more delicately, to their enthralled senses, than the odor of the meadow-sweet. And as they talked, Gerard plucked from the edge of the stream, purple willow, mint, and centaury roses, and tossed them into Helene's lap. "Well, I must say you are comfortable, young folks!" cried a stentorian voice that made them tremble.

It was Marius who appeared suddenly, parting the branches of the willows, laughing like a faun in his long blonde beard. Helene pouted, and Gerard rose from the ground, blushing as red as a poppy.

"Why do you blush, young Daphnis?" continued the poet; "do you take me for a jealous Cyclop, or a ferocious brother? I am acquainted with the pangs of love, and can sympathize with you. I always take the part of unhappy lovers against tutors and fathers."



"Marius, hush your nonsense," cried Helene, impatiently.

"By Smintheus Apollo!" he exclaimed, "I am speaking seriously—Gerard loves you; his father tyrannizes over him, and Madame Laheyraud forbids you to receive him. I am on the side of youthful lovers against their ancestors; you may count on me. Friend Gerard, you are a gallant fellow and intend to marry my sister; do you not?"

"That is my wish, my most ardent, my only hope," replied Gerard, gravely.

"Agreed!" cried Marius extending his hand. "We will bring the old folks to reason, and ere long we will be singing "*Hymen O Hyménée!*"

Helene's face had become crimson. "It is late," said she arising, "and we must go."

"You will permit me to see you here again?" hazarded Gerard timidly.

"I do not know," she murmured, hesitating, regarding alternately her brother and young Seigneulles.

"And why not?" exclaimed Marius impetuously. "Will I not be here, and is not that sufficient?"

They pressed each other's hands, and Gerard was soon wending his way to the farm with a light and happy heart.

XIII

After that meeting, Helene and Gerard returned more than once to Fond d'Enfer; Marius accompanied his sister regularly, but he was a most convenient chaperon, for on reaching the banks of the stream he would leave the lovers there while he repaired to the inn at Savonnière. Even when the first of September arrived, he renounced altogether the role of mentor to join a shooting party. Helene and Gerard were thus abandoned to themselves; but the habit was so strong, so sweet, that they had not the courage to break it. This rendezvous was to them the only thing interesting in life.

The purity of her love and the rectitude of her heart took away from Helene all fear of public opinion, which, after all, is at the bottom of more than half of the conventionality of the people of the world. She knew nothing of those prudent capitulations, of that cunning cleverness,

with which the inhabitants of small towns guard against each other.

In love, the Parisian, in spite of her superficial skepticism and apparent frivolity, acts more naturally and ingenuously than the provincial. Helene had faith in the love of Gerard, and in going to meet him at Fond d' Enfer, she knew that in the eyes of the world she was acting imprudently; but in her conscience she did not feel guilty. If one had sounded the hearts of the two young people one would certainly have found more scruples in the timid spirit of Gerard than in the firm and chastely passionate soul of the young girl.

Autumn advanced. September and the holidays had revived a pleasure for which the bourgeois of Juvigny have a lively taste—the snaring of small birds. In this forest country, there is not a landlord who does not make two or three hundred traps of supple, elastic hazel twigs and put them along the paths of his coppice. To these traps come the robin-redbreasts, sparrows, chaffinches, and linnets; and the natives experience great joy in making the round every morning to gather up the victims.

Now it happened that, towards the end of September, the owner of certain woods, whose sons were intimately acquainted with Marius, profiting

by the holidays, formed a hunting-party to end in a bountiful breakfast in the forest of Juré. To enliven the feast some of the ladies were invited to join their husbands, among whom Madame Grandfief, whose liege lord was a rampant Nimrod. Naturally, Marius was one of the party, for he was very popular on account of his high spirits and gayety. In spite of his eccentricities and his habit of reciting original sonnets after dessert, he was regarded as a convivial fellow, and was invited to all pleasure parties.

That morning they were en route at daybreak. After following the chase for several hours, they assembled in the woods, where a long table was spread under the great trees. Marius selected him a place opposite Madame Grandfief, who had left Georgette at home, not wishing to expose the chaste ears of her daughter to the somewhat broad jokes of a hunting breakfast. She replied to Marius' bow with a frigid nod, and assumed so majestic an attitude that young Laheyward hastened to flee from that haughty glance that threatened to take away his appetite. His eyes were compensated in contemplating the joyous aspect of the table, where an appetizing display of pastry, ham and lobster was spread out between two rows of bottles and glasses. When

they served the mutton roast, *a la ficelle*, the heart of the poet expanded. On either side of him was a rustic hunter with manners naive and outspoken. The apparent simplicity of these two peaceable bourgeois, tempted Marius, and he promised himself to enliven his breakfast by drawing out the two honest Philistines. As soon as his plate was helped to a succulent chop, he opened a bottle of wine, refilled his own glass and those of his neighbors.

"Let us try this claret," he exclaimed, "for I have, like Saint-Amand, one of those thirsty throats that nothing ever quenches:

"*'Le jour que je naquis, il dut pleuvoir du sel!'*"

"Do you defy our country wine, Monsieur?" replied his neighbor on the right; "it looks innocent, but it is wicked at heart, and as heady as the devil."

"Wicked? this innocent milk! Here's to you!" retorted Marius, disdainfully emptying his glass.

"I will have you know, my dear sirs, that the blood of the grape is not strong enough to trouble the serenity of my brain. It would take the opium of the Chinese, the hasheesh of the Indians and the *raki* of the Polynesians to intoxicate me!"

"That's different!" said the rustic, with that

silly laugh under which the country man hides his malice and finesse. At the same time he winked significantly, behind the poet's back, to his companion.

Marius continued brilliantly talkative, while devouring his mutton and drinking copiously.

"You see," he continued, "two or three glasses of wine would upset the nervous equilibrium of those easy-going folks who spend their lives sheep-raising; but artists, and people who are used to the tempests of thought, they laugh at drunkenness. We soar in the storm like the albatross."

"That is to say," sneered his interlocutor, "that you take to wine like a fish to water."

"Well spoken, honest fellow!" cried Marius, "and for your pains pour me out another bumper. Pour boldly an overflowing glass; and then to your health!"

The loud bursts of laughter of the convivial guests, the clinking of glasses, and the rattling of the knives and forks, to say nothing of the noisy applause that greeted the fabulous stories of the hunters, drowned this conversation.

The tipsy poet, pressed by his neighbors, who did not allow his glass to remain empty, became more loquacious as the tumult around the table

increased. Bizarre comparisons, strange images, and lyrical invocations fell from his lips, mingled with Rabelaisian memories.

"By Zeus!" he cried suddenly, "I believe you will offer me the decanter next! A plague upon that muddy wine! Will you not take with me a drink of water like my noble friend, Gerard de Seigneulles?"

"M. Gerard;" exclaimed his neighbor on the right. "I thought he would be here, but I do not see him anywhere."

"His father has put him in quarantine at Grange-Allard," responded the neighbor on the left, who was a notary in the village adjoining the farm. "I hear that the young man's heart is too inflammable and that M. de Seigneulles has sent him to the country to calm it down, as one puts wine into a cellar to cool it."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Marius, heartily.

"Why are you amused, young man?"

"I laugh," replied the poet, "to think how love scorns the threats of parents and dungeon walls."

The notary winked anew to the other, as much as to say that he would adroitly make the poet commit.

"What!" said he, "do you pretend to say that

young de Seigneulles is not at Grange-Allard?"

"He is; and he is not," responded Marius with a comical air of mystery. He was suddenly conscious of the cold gaze of Madame Grandfief fixed upon him, and it recalled him partially to his senses. "Pshaw!" he continued, "you wish to make me tattle; but I am as silent as the grave; I will not tell in what verdant corner of the forest, Endymion goes to find the Diana of his dreams. Let us drink!"

They had uncorked the champagne and the foaming beverage sparkled in the glasses

"To your health, young man," said the notary, "but you must not tell us such fibs. It is very far from the farm to Juvigny, and what lover would walk three leagues there, and three leagues back to warble plaintively under the window of his Dulcinea?"

"What do you know about it?" retorted Marius, irritated at the contradiction. "You speak like a freshman. Nothing is impossible to lovers. The woods offer their leafy solitude and the Fond d'Enfer has beech-trees dense enough to keep the words of lovers from the ears of gossips."

He believed that he was speaking in an undertone, but like all people when wine loosens their

tongues, he spoke in a loud tone and his words rose above the uproar of the other voices.

Madame Grandfief, seated not far from him, fixed her eyes upon Marius and did not lose a word of his discourse.

"You believe then that they meet at Fond d'Enfer?" insidiously questioned the notary.

"Who has spoken of Fond d'Enfer?" stammered Marius. "A notary is as stubborn as a mule; you are trying to draw me out with your pretended ignorance. But I have said nothing, and I will say nothing. Trust me to keep silent; friendship to me is sacred. I drink to the Goddess Muta. I drink to the Olympian, poetic silence of the forests!"

At this moment Marius had only a confused perception of things, but through the mist of drunkenness the two gleaming eyes of Madame Grandfief affected him like the gaze of a serpent that charms a bird.

After dessert, someone arose to sing a song; at that moment Marius, attempting to change his place, stumbled and fell heavily to the grass, amid bursts of laughter, and he had a vague idea that he was the cause of such noisy merriment.

"The legs may be weak, but the head is sound," said he.

Notwithstanding his resistance, he felt himself lifted up by two compassionate arms, and conveyed to a carriage which was soon rolling rapidly in the direction of Juvigny, while it seemed to Marius that the branches of the trees were blown furiously about in a terrible wind. At last the carriage stopped before the house of the Inspector, and the poet was lifted out by those same indulgent arms and carried to his room, where they laid him, without undressing him, upon his bachelor bed. The furniture seemed to be whirling around with a rapidity that made him dizzy; he closed his eyes, and lost consciousness.

XIV

The crowd was so animated and noisy that the mishap of Marius was hardly noticed. Coffee was served and heads became cooler. The ladies left the table and went to sit on the green sward, and, ere long, there were only left around the table the older hunters, smoking their pipes and relating to each other their exploits of former days, with that boastful familiarity begotten by a copious breakfast. The younger men formed a circle on the grass not far from the ladies. Madame Grandfief, who had been thoughtful and reserved for some time, seemed suddenly to thaw. Her countenance became cheerful and her eyes shone with unaffected gayety. It was she who proposed a suitable diversion for all those excited brains and restless feet.

"Choose a route," she said, "and let us make the *Porte de Saint-Nicolas*."

The *Porte de Saint-Nicolas* is a game well-known

in Lorraine. The players join hands, forming a long chain, each link being represented alternately by a dame and a cavalier. The two leaders standing at the head, lift their joined hands to form an arch. "Is the *Porte de Saint-Nicolas* open?" cry in chorus the rest of the band, and on being answered in the affirmative the whole file passes rapidly under the improvised arch, singing the air of a rondeau. The couple at the extreme end then takes the lead, forming the arch in their turn, and the long garland winds and unwinds itself as they dance merrily along.

The proposition from the wife of the iron-master was received with enthusiasm; they all began to discuss in what direction they should go. Some one suggested the *Hêtre de la Vierge*, another the *Ermitage de Saint-Roch*.

"No," said Madame Grandfief in a tone of command, "we will go to Fond d'Enfer; that road is far more beautiful."

Joining hands, the air of the rondeau rang out, and the long chain was soon gracefully in motion, following the sinuosities of the way like a joyous farandole. The waving arms, the restless feet, the floating petticoats fluttering lightly in the breeze, the rippling laughter—ere long the merry band had entirely disappeared under the branches of the trees.

It was nearly midday. Under the beech trees of Fond d'Enfer, near the rushing streamlet, Helene and Gerard had met as usual. Although she had arranged her canvas and selected her brushes, the young girl had scarcely touched them; she contemplated, with an air of melancholy, the flight of the first autumn leaves as they fell softly into the water.

"You are serious," said Gerard; "of what are you thinking?"

"Of ourselves," she replied gravely.

"Does that make you sad! Are we not happy?"

"How long shall we be so? I have a presentiment that people suspect us, that they are watching us. The other evening, after you left me, I met that little seamstress, Reine Lecomte, and from the manner in which she scanned me, I believe that she suspects something."

"Then you regret that you have come."

"No," she replied quickly, "if I had a fear it was for you. I thought of my father, who is so kind and trusting, and how compromising would be the discovery of our rendezvous."

"You are right," sighed Gerard, "and I am very selfish;" and he became serious and thoughtful in his turn.

"This state of things cannot last much longer,"

he exclaimed with passion. "I love you, and I am my own master. I will make my father listen to reason."

Helene opened her great brown eyes with a look half-incredulous, half-questioning.

"I will again beg his consent," said Gerard, "and if he is inflexible, I will leave the house forever."

The young girl lifted her head and a smile came to her lips.

"From what you have told me, he will allow you to depart. What then?"

"I shall wait until I am twenty-five, and then I will send him legal summons."

Helene frowned.

"It is I who shall then refuse," she retorted proudly; "I will never enter a family where the head of the house spurns me."

Gerard looked so wounded and disheartened, that Helene was instantly touched and forced herself to smile cheerfully. She laid her hand upon his.

"Let us think no more of sad things," she said. "What good will it do to lose our afternoon in tormenting ourselves. Look how beautiful is the valley in the lengthening shadows! It is glorious here. I wish to drink in every

aspect of this country that I may never forget it."

Her eyes gazed at the woody hills whercon the shadows descended in great masses above the wild vines full of berries, close to which the *pretty-by-nights* were already opening their blossoms.

In the meantime, Gerard had not relinquished her hand. In the drowsy calm of that fading autumn afternoon they sat there silent, with clasped hands, unresistingly yielding to the enervating languor, the seductive, voluptuous intoxication of that dreamy September day. Their lips were speechless, but their eyes met spell-bound, in long, passionate glances; their hearts beat excitedly and the palms of their hands seemed to have grown together.

Suddenly, in the distance, shrill voices and fragments of song disturbed the peace of that charmed solitude. At this season of the year these joyous sounds from the depths of the woods were so natural that the two lovers did not notice them.

The silence of the forest was broken only by the soft notes of a robin-red-breast.

Helene's brown eyes drew Gerard like a magnet; he inclined his head toward her lovely face,

and allured by that magnetic glance, he was pressing upon her lips, for the first time, a kiss, when a noisy burst of voices suspended brusquely that delicious caress—and suddenly from behind the hills the long chain of the *Porte de Saint-Nicolas* descended tumultuously almost to the bottom of the valley, Madame Grandfief leading them.

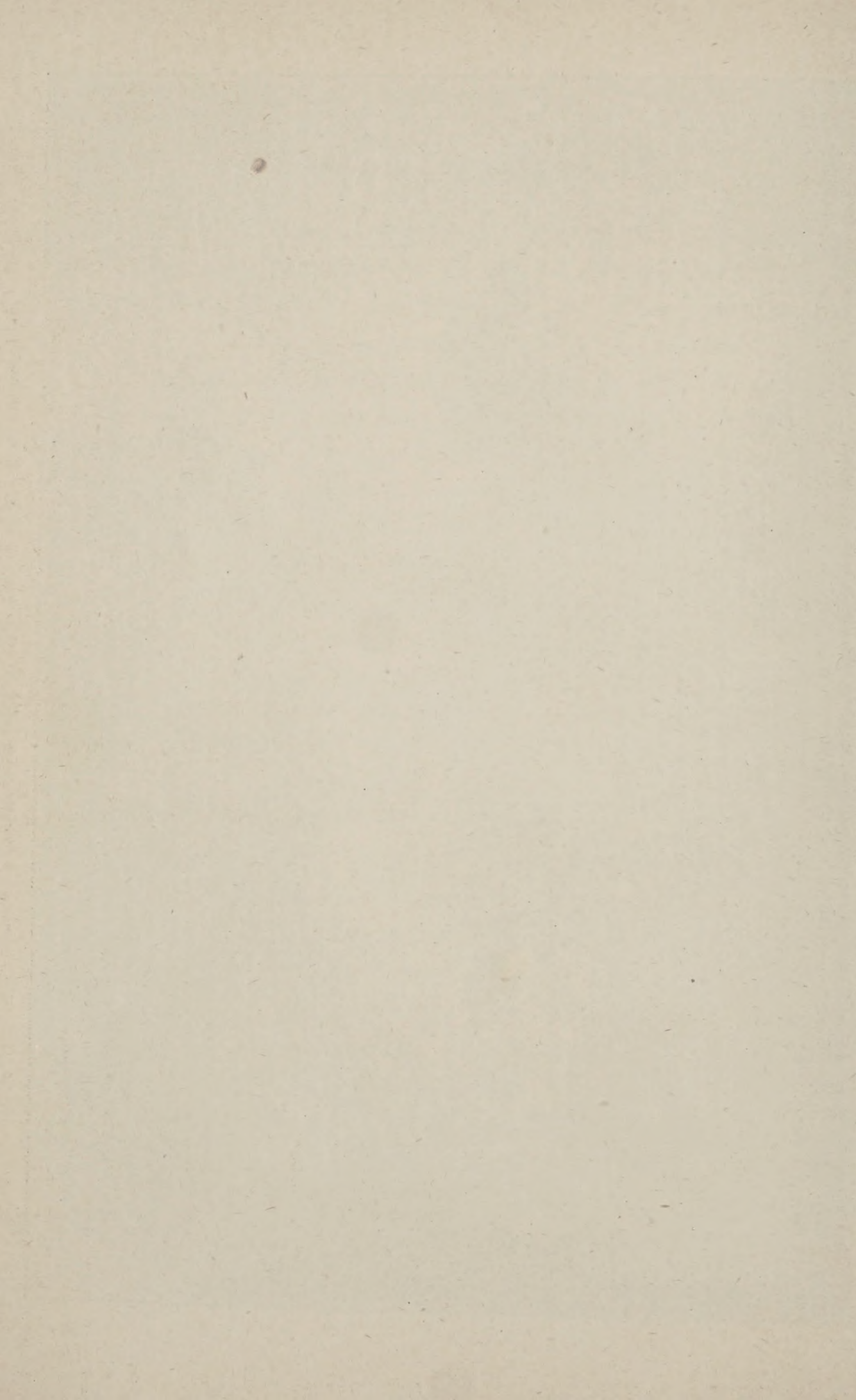
It was like a thunderbolt—so quick and so dreadful—the two young people had hardly time to think before the joyous band was scattered along the banks of the stream. Songs and laughter succeeded the sweet, solemn silence. Everyone had recognized the two lovers. Helene, blushing with confusion, hurriedly resumed her sketch, while Gerard, who had arisen, stood near her, very pale and with compressed lips. The new-comers, to whom this meeting was unexpected, were equally embarrassed. Madame Grandfief alone did not lose her sang froid. She passed the unfortunate Gerard without deigning to look at him; then addressing Helene with a politely ironical air, she said mercilessly:

"We have disturbed you, it seems;" and glancing at the canvas upon which there was hardly a stroke of the brush, she added: "What a lovely sketch you are painting here, mademoiselle!"

And withdrawing from Helene's side, she returned to her companions, saying:



Thos. Gray



"Let us continue our walk, and leave Mlle. Laheyraud to her occupations."

She directed her steps toward a beaten path that led through the woods, and the others followed her, not without throwing malicious glances at the two culprits. As soon as they were hidden from view by the undergrowth and the branches of the trees, they all began to laugh and sneer aloud, and the breeze bore to Helene's ears these cruel words, spoken by Madame Grandfief: "Bah! this is a fortunate incident for her—it will compromise her, and she will have a pretext to make him marry her!"

Gradually their boisterous voices grew fainter in the distance, and once more silence reigned in the valley. One could only hear the murmuring of the stream and the soft warblings of the red-breast, who, after a moment of fright, had bravely resumed its song. At last Gerard dared to look at Helene, who sat motionless, her face buried in her hands. He was frightened at her tragic expression and attitude, and a groan escaped his lips.

"Ah!" exclaimed the young girl, "I believe that I am ruined!"

"And it is I who have brought this sorrow upon you," he cried, wringing his hands. "That

miserable woman is revenging herself upon me for refusing her daughter."

He walked up and down on the banks of the stream, cursing Madame Grandfief, stammering incoherent words, completely distracted.

"What will become of us?" he said finally; "to-morrow the whole town will know all, and my father shall never pardon me!"

Helene discerned vaguely that Gerard had a horrible fear of the Chevalier, a terror which deprived him of all liberty of thought, and she felt that she must have courage for them both. She arose and began to collect her painting materials.

"We must part!" she said sadly, "and you must return to the farm, and must promise me not to leave it for several days."

"Bury myself there without news of you! never!" exclaimed Gerard. "I will return to Juvigny and face the storm."

"I forbid you!" cried Helene in a resolute tone; "your haste will spoil all. Obey me, if you love me. Make yourself forgotten for a few days—till Marius writes to you. Adieu! think of me!" She pressed his hand, and turning, started off rapidly in the direction of Juvigny.

"Helene!" he cried, broken-hearted; but she would not listen, and soon her white dress dis-

appeared behind the foliage of the winding path-way.

When she reached home, she entered the house by the shortest way, and found the whole family upset by the misadventure of Marius. Tonton and Benjamin related to her how their brother had returned from the *champêtre* breakfast, and how he had to be carried up to his room; but Helene was too agitated to lend an attentive ear to the gossip of the children.

During dinner time, she remained silent, hardly daring to lift her eyes to M. Lahey-rard, from whom they had concealed this new freak of his eldest son. Upon leaving the table she feigned a headache and sought refuge in her room. There, her heart overflowed and she began weeping bitterly. What must she do? Tomorrow—that evening perhaps—the adventure of Fond d'Enfer would be spread through the whole town, and it could not possibly fail to reach the ears of M. de Seigneulles, or even M. Lahey-rard. What a terrible blow this scandal would be to her father, whose position as Inspector at Juvigny was already so difficult and insecure!

Her tears increased at this thought, and at the same time the cruel words of the mother of Georgette resounded in her ears: "This will

compromise her so that she will have a pretext to make him marry her!"

The indignation with which she resented this insulting supposition, suddenly revived her depressed courage.

"No!" she exclaimed, her pride revolting at the idea. "I will show them that in spite of my giddy ways I am better than all of them."

Little by little, the idea of returning to Paris to seek employment as a teacher, reawakened in her heart. The intoxicating enervation that had enthralled her for the past month had made her forget the plans for her departure, but the escapade of Fond d'Enfer had dissipated forever all thoughts of that happy marriage. She indulged in no more illusions; Gerard was lost to her; he would never dare oppose his father to the last, and if he dared, it would be in vain, for the obstinate old Chevalier would never yield. Domestic quarrels only exasperate people, without bringing about any good results. Who knows but later on, his heart becoming weary and embittered, Gerard might even end by regretting that he had ever known and loved her? No, she could not endure such a misfortune, and this role of disturber of the family peace was indeed too repugnant to her. It was better for her to go far

away from Juvigny, for then her enemies might forget her and the scene at Fond d'Enfer, and M. Laheyraud be no longer in danger of losing his position.

She pondered over these things as the last rays of the setting sun glided obliquely into her room, while the sonorous snoring of Marius resounded through the partition wall. Her old school-teacher of the boarding-school of the Rue de Vaugirard had often proposed to her to return to her establishment to teach drawing to her pupils. Helene hastily penned a few lines to the kind lady, announcing her early arrival, and begging her hospitality. She hurried away to mail the letter.

When she returned, she felt more tranquil, and less discontented with herself. At eighteen, one has a passion for devotion and sacrifice. She began to make preparations for her departure. She opened the drawers and packed up carefully and tenderly each trifling object that she loved—the garland of blackberry blossoms that she wore at the Salvanches ball; the favorite books she had read with Gerard; two or three withered flowers plucked by him; and then she folded up, with a sigh of regret, the modest little dress of so small cost and yet so daintily elegant.

"Yes," she thought, while disposing of each article at the bottom of the chest of drawers, "when he thinks of me no bitterness will ever mar the sweetness of his memories. He shall think of me always as I was at the Salvanches ball; he will not repent having known me, and he will keep in his heart a little corner of blue sky which no cloud will ever obscure—that certainly will be a dear consolation to me when I am among strangers, far away from him and my father."

Profound silence reigned within the house; in the distance she could hear the rolling of carriages and the tic-tac of a weaver's loom. At last the trunk was packed; Helene wiped away a tear, shut down the lid, and began to undress, thinking as the sobs filled her throat, that this would be the last night she should pass in her father's house.

XV

The next morning at daybreak, the drunken stupor that had kept Marius upon his bed for eighteen hours, had only partially vanished. The poet arose with a dry mouth and a heavy head. He discovered that his bed had not been opened and that he had slept in his clothes. He rubbed his eyes, opened the window, plunged his face into fresh water, and, as if that immersion had cleared away from his brain the misty fumes of wine, he suddenly remembered all. He saw the two rustic neighbors at the table with their bantering smiles, their glasses always filled to overflowing with that treacherous wine; the singular glances of Madame Grandfief; and he recalled the strange manner in which the conversation had been turned upon Gerard's love affair. A terrible shudder passed over him.

"Dreadful brute that I am!" he cried, giving

himself a hard blow with his fist. "What foolish things I must have said!"

He ran immediately to find his sister in her studio, where she was busy packing up her paints and brushes. He entered with a downcast countenance.

"My poor Helene," he began, greatly abashed. "I was intoxicated yesterday, and I very much fear that I disclosed more than was prudent."

He then narrated to her the incidents of the hunting breakfast. As he spoke, his memory became more lively and he was fully conscious of his having committed an unpardonable indiscretion. Helene took his hand.

"Yes, Marius," she said gently, "you have talked too much, and we must all suffer for it."

In her turn she described the scene at Fond d'Enfer, and the conduct of Madame Grandfief.

Marius felt his legs totter beneath him, and he sank into a chair.

"Donkey! Idiot!" he cried tearing his hair. "I understand now why that miserable prude kept her piercing black eyes upon me. She listened to my foolish words and profited by them. Ah! poor little sister, what will become of you, and how wretched I am!" and the big, strapping fellow bowed his head and wept like a child.

"Do not grieve," said Helene, touched by his despair. "It is not altogether your fault; I too am to be blamed. I am not angry with you, you great goose."

She patted him gently on the shoulder and tried to take his hand.

"Great Heavens!" he exclaimed; "this must not end here! I will hasten to Grange-Allard; Gerard is an honorable fellow, and we will make that venerable fossil of a father give his consent willingly or by force."

"You must do nothing of the sort, Marius," interrupted Helene with firmness.

"What!" cried the poet, jumping excitedly, "must I leave you compromised, without demanding the reparation that is due you!"

"I wish to remain as I am: an honest girl, and I do not intend they shall say that I took advantage of this scandal to make a good marriage. It is useless to insist," she continued, placing her hand over his mouth. "My resolution is formed. I have written to Madame Le Mancel and I shall leave for Paris this evening."

Marius, absolutely dumfounded, shrugged his shoulders in utter despair.

"My good Marius," Helene continued, "listen to me, and, for your punishment, obey me. Once

in Paris they will forget me, and it is necessary at any price to avoid an exposure that would reflect upon our father. Think of what would become of the family should he lose his position. I will leave this evening. You must hire a carriage and accompany me as far as Blesmes where I shall take the train. This is not all; you must swear to me that you will not speak to Gerard of my departure until you have my permission. I do not want him to make a *coup de tête*."

She stopped a moment, and taking from the wall a little painting, a study of wild flowers, she said: "Later on, when all is peaceful, give to him this little picture from me; it will be a souvenir of our lovely walks—"

Sobs filled her throat and she could not speak, but wishing to be brave to the end, she mastered her feelings energetically. Marius, who loved her deeply, clasped her in his arms.

"I am not worthy to kiss the hem of your dress," he cried, "but all the same, if you wished—"

She silenced him with a resolute glance.

"Do as I tell you; leave me now and say nothing to anyone before breakfast."

Marius left the room; Helene put on her hat, and through an unfrequented street she reached

the church of Saint-Etienne. She was not a bigot, but she had a religion of her own, full of naive superstitions and sudden fervors. Lighting a taper that the sacristan placed upon a trident where two bits of candle were smoldering, she went and knelt in the shadows and improvised an eloquent prayer: "God grant that my leaving my father's house may be a sufficient expiation, and that I alone may suffer for my fault!" She did not dare to add: "God grant that Gerard may not forget me!" but from the depths of her heart this wish sprang up and floated heavenward, concealed under the wings of her prayer. When she lifted her head the old church seemed more gloomy and austere than ever before. The pillars, moldy from dampness, threw a deep shadow on the obscure corner where she was kneeling; the image of Christ suspended on the wall between the two thieves, had a broken-hearted expression of humility and suffering, and a black marble skeleton representing Death, the work of an old Lorraine artist, held toward her his hour-glass with a menacing gesture. Helene shivered and left the church benumbed with fear and cold.

As she turned the corner to regain the Rue du Tribel, she found herself face to face with Fran-

celin Finoël. The hunchback had seen her enter Saint-Etienne, and had lingered near the church for her return.

"I wish to say a few words to you," he murmured before she could avoid him, "although you have closed your door upon me, I bear you no malice and you have no better friend than I."

Helene walked hurriedly along without replying, but he resolutely followed her.

"Well," he continued, "what I predicted has befallen you! You are compromised and your name is ill-spoken of in the town. For me, I do not believe what they say, and to prove it, I will renew my offer to you. Will you give me your hand in exchange for my name?"

A crimson blush suffused the brow of the young girl. The scandal was then already so widely spread that the hunchback had felt encouraged by it to press his hateful suit!

"You have a soul baser than I supposed," she replied indignantly.

"And you—how tenacious are your hopes! After what happened yesterday, do you still expect to marry Gerard de Seigneulles?"

"I hope to leave this town this evening, and my last and greatest mortification before leaving it, is that I have met and heard you."

She looked up and crushed the little hunchback with a glance full of scorn and contempt, then hastened homeward, at last, alone.

At breakfast, Marius whispered into her ear:

"The carriage is engaged for this evening at eight o'clock."

The time had come for Helene to break the silence, and her heart beat violently; she could hardly bring herself to inform M. Laheyward of her resolution.

"I will speak to him directly," she said, and she delayed the fatal moment. At last, as she arose from the table, she said in a trembling voice:

"Petit père, you know that Mme. Le Mancel insists that I shall return to her to teach drawing; I have carefully thought over her proposition, and have decided to accept it."

M. Laheyward turned pale; Madame Leheyward put down her knife and fork and sat with her mouth gaping.

"I wish to leave as soon as possible," continued Helene. "I have already given my reasons to my brother, and he approves of my resolve; do you not, Marius?"

The poet stammered some words of assent, and not being able to keep his countenance, he arose and began to fill his pipe.

"What!" cried the old professor. "Will you leave us? But there is no need of such haste—"

"It is necessary to make the best of Madame Le Mancel's kindness, and I have decided to start this evening."

At these words about starting, Tonton and Benjamin, who adored Helene, began to weep and cling to her skirts.

"This is nonsense," exclaimed Madame Lahey-rard; "to-day—this evening! of what are you dreaming! Your clothes are not ready; your trunk is not packed!"

"Pardon me," said Helene, "but I have packed what is necessary; you can send the rest, later on."

"Who ever heard of the like?" continued Madame Lahey-rard. "What will the neighbors say at seeing you depart as if you had committed a crime?"

"The neighbors may say what they choose," replied Helene; "I am not in the habit of concerning myself about their opinions."

M. Lahey-rard remained silent. He took his daughter's arm and drew her into the garden.

"My child," said the poor man, sighing, "this sudden departure gives me reason to believe that you are concealing something from me. Is any one molesting you here?"

"No, petit père; I am as happy as possible; only you know it is necessary to think of the future. Here are the children who are growing, and your salary will not keep pace with the appetites of these two little ones."

"I understand—I understand; and you are a warm-hearted girl; but what is to become of me? how am I to live without you? You are my companion, my joy! But, after all, fathers are selfish; kiss me, my own little girl."

She placed her arms around his neck, and kissed him fondly, struggling bravely to keep back the tears.

The afternoon passed away sadly. At nightfall, the *cabriolet*, driven by Marius, stood before the door. Madame Laheyraud, concluding that the time had come for her to show her grief, burst into tears. The children joined in a chorus. Helene embraced them all tenderly, reserving the last kisses for her father.

"Write me long letters," said the old man, his voice trembling with emotion.

"Come on; it is time to start," cried Marius, who with difficulty could keep back his tears. "We are late and we must not miss the train at Blesmes."

Helen climbed into the vehicle and they rolled rapidly away.

In order not to cross the town, Marius took a circuitous route by way of Combles. He reached the forest just as the curfew sounded nine o'clock. They were both silent; the only sounds to be heard were the stamping of the horses' hoofs on the hard road and the cracking of the whip that Marius handled in a nervous manner.

"So you do not wish me to speak to Gerard of your departure?" said he suddenly.

"No, I beg of you!" exclaimed Helene in a resolute tone.

Marius, much moved by the apparent stoicism of his sister, contented himself with giving a kind of grunt to show his disapproval, and the conversation ceased. When they reached the summit of the plateau the road overlooked a vast extent of the forest, and the moon rising suddenly above the horizon spread a fleecy, luminous veil over the woods and lighted up the roofs of the farm in the distance. Marius, standing upon the seat, pointed with his whip to the pointed gables clearly defined against the sky.

"See," he whispered, "we can now see the roofs of Grange-Allard. To think that poor Gerard waits in vain there, not dreaming that we are passing within a stone's throw of his lodgings!"



Helene felt her heart beat excitedly. She could not refrain from rising and looking out in the direction indicated.

Thanks to a radiant moon, one could distinguish clearly the farm with its barns, turrets and pigeon houses. The young girl drank in every detail with a hungry look. She knew that at a word from her, Marius would whip up his horse in the direction of Grange-Allard. She would surprise Gerard in the dreary corner of the kitchen hearth, they would clasp each other's hands once more. The temptation was strong, and a month ago she would certainly have succumbed to it, but the mortifications of the past two days had matured her reason and cruelly dried up that wild flow of animal spirits that formerly bubbled in her brain. She bit her lips, closed her eyes, and threw herself into her corner of the carriage, crying to Marius: "Drive on or we will not arrive in time for the train."

Marius made the air resound with a shrill whistle, and whipped up his horse.

"You women are astonishing," he muttered, looking at Helene stealthily. "Some of you are bundles of mysterious complications that amaze me."

"Apropos of what are you saying that?" asked Helene.

"Apropos of you; you leave Juvigny, in hurried mystery, to go and teach little girls how to draw ears and eyes; that is very courageous, I agree with you; but at the same time you are indifferent to the sufferings of my friend Gerard. He loves you, after all; although he is a little bit of a milksop. he loves you, and you do not seem to care."

These reproaches entered like sharp arrows into Helene's heart. She did not have the courage to reply, so she turned away her head that the rays of the moon might not reveal the tears that dropped down her cheek.

"Yes," mercilessly continued the poet, whipping up his lean horse, "you women haven't skulls formed like ours; you are hard, you are fierce, and you do not know how to love."

"Hush, Marius," stammered Helene in a begging voice, "you make me miserable."

She leaned against the side of the vehicle and feigned sleep. Little by little, owing to the soothing motion of the carriage and the wakeful hours she had spent the night before, her eyelids grew heavy, and closed over her moist eyes. It was more the sleep of exhaustion than of repose, and at the least jolting she woke up. She seemed to see, as in a dream, the forest, the open fields,

the vineyard's slopes with their waving vine branches, and the elms on the roadside that assumed distorted, menacing forms as they flew past them. At last she fell into a deep slumber, and when she awoke they were crossing the plains of Champagne, where a flock of sheep was huddled close to a shepherd's tent. The shrill whistle of the locomotive resounded in the distance, and lights began to scintillate. It was the station of Blesmes.

Helene aroused herself; the tears had hardly had time to dry upon her cheeks before they arrived.

Marius jumped down briskly and went to have the baggage checked. Soon they found themselves alone in the waiting-room where a smoky lamp burned dimly.

The poor fellow noticed then the tear-stained face of his sister, and his heart smote him. Helene, with her face pressed against the glass door, watched the puffing of the locomotive that was to carry her so far away from her loved ones.

"Go, my dear Marius, adieu! Be kind to our father."

"Ah! a thousand million demons!" cried Marius, "you are weeping, and if it had not been for

my foolishness this would never have happened. How I wish I had that miserable Madame Grandfief between four walls! I would make her pay dearly for her perfidious behavior."

"Passengers for Paris; all aboard!" cried the porter, opening the glass door.

The sister and brother embraced once more; the doors of the railway carriages were closed, and through the open window Helene threw a last kiss to Marius as the train moved off.

XVI

"When I am far away they will forget it all," Helene had repeated over and over again to strengthen her courage in leaving home, but she knew very little of provincial towns, or rather she was too much of a Parisian to understand them. In Paris, an event, scandalous as it may be, falls with a great crash into the surging ocean of the great city; the noise that follows is promptly smothered by the tumult of crowds unceasingly renewed, and by the louder clamor of rival scandals that succeed it. It is not thus in the tranquil, silent stream of provincial life; the smallest pebble that ruffles its sleepy waters awakens a thousand sonorous echoes, and produces on its surface a succession of undulating circles that are ever widening. The inhabitants of small towns, who watch behind discreetly drawn blinds the goings and comings of their neighbors, welcome a scandal as a rare morsel, a delicious,

unctuous treat, which they season with marvelous ingredients, and upon which they breakfast and dine for many days.

Helene's hasty departure, far from making them forget the adventure of Fond d'Enfer, only gave an excuse and opportunity for gossip as ingenious as it was uncharitable. The real cause of that flight was too simple, too generous, for any one to accept it as true, and in seeking for another the imagination of the inhabitants had full play. One of the first, little Reine, insinuated, tossing her head, that the motive of that mysterious departure was perhaps much graver than they had supposed.

"When one's conscience is easy," said this prudent young woman, "one does not run away like a criminal, and if Mlle. Laheyward left Juvigny by stealth, it was because she wished to conceal the consequences, too visible, of her promenades in the forest." Upon which the grisette winked her eye significantly, and left people to draw their own conclusions.

Ere long it was whispered that Gerard Seigneulles had seriously compromised Helene. This calumny made the tour of the town, and as the young girl, by her independent ways, her spirited wit, and her brilliant beauty had excited

many jealousies, the wicked rumor gained credence everywhere.

Among Helene's accusers one of the most implacable and most dangerous was Madame Grandfief. She did not blame her openly, but she had a terribly cruel way of exonerating her.

"For my part," she said with a smile, "I have never believed ill of her, and Christian charity forbids any rash judgment; but when I remember the deplorable education this poor child has received, I am obliged to admit that much of what is said is probably true. No principles, no deportment, and a mother who never watched over her! How can one be surprised when a girl thus neglected turns out badly? This is what I would say to mothers who have daughters: "Mesdames, are your principles sound? without them the best, most brilliant qualities amount to nothing. Thank God, Georgette has been brought up differently! I have never been willing to send her to a convent; my eyes have never left her; she has no secrets from her mother, and I can read her heart like a book. I answer for her as I do for myself."

As for Georgette Grandfief, what she was allowed to hear of these rumors in regard to Helene rendered her deeply thoughtful. Although she

was exceedingly ignorant of certain things and possessed an inactive mind, those covert words reflecting on the absence of Mlle. Laheyraud, those whispered allusions to that flight which led people to believe that she was guilty, all this being the result of her frivolous conduct, sharpened singularly the wits of the curious, naive girl.

She would ask herself, not without a certain uncomfortable feeling, how these mysterious walks to Fond d'Enfer could so quickly have ended in such disastrous results. There is no young girl of eighteen so ingenuous—discreetly reared though she may be—that she does not turn over in her little head many times the disquieting problem of marriage and its consequences.

Georgette had, like the rest of her sex, indulged in this very feminine preoccupation, and the frightful adventure of Helene greatly piqued her ill-satisfied curiosity. How could love before marriage terminate in such a strange catastrophe? She was so much the more perplexed because her own conscience was not entirely clear. This model girl, who had so much principle, had also some trifling peccadilloes with which to reproach herself, in regard to Marius Laheyraud

—a sonnet imprudently accepted, a pressure of hands prolonged at the end of a waltz, and even two or three tender glances exchanged in passing.

In her candid ignorance, Georgette asked herself if she was not gliding along the perilous road whereon Helene had made such a terrible fall. But at the same time, by a singular contradiction, in spite of those scruples, she could not refrain dreaming complacently of that big handsome youth—so robust, so full of fun and so captivating.

The gossip traveled on, rolling from house to house, increasing in its passage, like a snowball. It halted only on the threshold of the house of M. de Seigneulles, and at the door of the Laheyards. It even crept into the home of the Chevalier, brought there by Manette, who heard it while on a visit to the trades-people in the lower town; but the old servant knew her master too well not to hold her tongue, and as to the taciturn Baptiste he did not open his mouth, as was his wont. In spite of all this reserve, M. de Seigneulles seemed uneasy, as if smelling something in the wind.

One evening on entering the parlor of Mme. de Travanette the conversation broke off sudden-

ly; the assembled visitors showed discreet but embarrassed countenances, and the old dame herself appeared uncomfortable, and did not inquire after the health of Gerard, as was customary with her. A visitor arriving some time after the Chevalier, happened to mention incidentally the flight of Mlle. Laheyward; a general silence followed that untimely remark, and side-glances signaled to the new-comer the presence of M. de Seigneulles.

M. de Seigneulles returned home that night very thoughtful indeed, and opened his mouth only to eat and drink. He ascended to his chamber whistling the air of *La Belle Bourbonnaise*, which was to Manette always a sign of tempest.

The next morning, shaving day, the Chevalier was already installed in the kitchen, when Magdelinet appeared with a manner more obsequious, and a backbone more flexible than ever. The barber, of course, knew all the rumors that had put the town in commotion, but since the affair of the Willows ball he had been more circumspect, and notwithstanding his loquacious mood, he remained silent during the operation. It was M. de Seigneulles who first broke the silence.

"Well, Magdelinet," he said, "what's the news?"

"Nothing, Monsieur; absolutely nothing."

"Humph! you are very little *au courant* for a man of your profession. Are you not aware that our neighbor, Mlle. Laheyward, has left Juvigny?"

"Pardon me," responded the barber, "I know all about that, but I thought it useless to weary you with such gossip."

"It is not gossip, it is a fact," pursued the Chevalier innocently.

Magdelinet looked at him with amazement.

Deceived by the impassive expression of his customer, he imagined that M. de Seigneulles knew of the adventure and was not much concerned about it. So he replied more pleasantly: "Yes it is a fact without doubt, unfortunately, but you know they always exaggerate these things and we should believe only one-half of what they say."

M. de Seigneulles started. "And what in the deuce do they say?" he cried, flashing his gray eyes upon Magdelinet, who recoiled with fright. The unfortunate barber instantly understood that he had made a grievous blunder, and so attempted to mend matters, saying with affected carelessness:

"The ignoramuses! The world is so wicked! For my part I will wager that after all it was

only thoughtlessness, and that M. Gerard is not to blame."

"Gerard! By the pope's shoe! What has my son to do with that ridiculous affair!"

The Chevalier rose from the chair furious, and with an angry gesture pushed Magdelinet into a corner of the kitchen.

The barber, as white as the china plates on the dresser, tried to extricate himself, and threw toward the door a look of despair.

"Did I mention M. Gerard? It was a slip of the tongue. In such cases one never knows who is the guilty party."

"Guilty party!" roared M. de Seigneulles, taking the unfortunate Magdelinet by the collar and pinning him to the wall. "Ah!" he cried trembling with wrath, "miserable brute! You know more than you have said. Hasten to speak clearly or I will tear out your miserable tongue and nail it between two owls on the door of my dog-kennel."

"What do you wish me to say?" stammered the barber half suffocated. "I only know what is talked of by the whole town; they pretend that the daughter of the Inspector has been compromised, and there *are* wicked people who add—who suppose—"

"That it is my son who has done this wrong."

"They insinuate it, but I do not believe it," replied Magdelinet.

"Ah! *you* do not believe it!" cried the Chevalier, dancing around the barber. "Do you imagine that I care for your opinion? Leave me instantly, and never darken my doors again!"

Magdelinet fled without demanding his fee, and as for the Chevalier he remained behind on his threshold like a statue of stone. Manette watched him, trembling in every limb. Suddenly he threw off his robe de chambre and pitching it at Manette's head he cried in a thundering voice:

"Bring me my coat!"

When he had dressed, he ran to the house of the Abbé Valland and made him submit to a most rigid examination. The Curé knew that Helene had taken refuge in Paris at a boarding-school in the Rue de Vaugirard; he knew all the calumnies afloat concerning the young girl, and though he did not believe her guilty, he was obliged to admit regretfully that appearances were against her.

This conclusion was far from reassuring for the Chevalier; he remained closeted for more than an hour with the Abbé, and he had hardly left the parsonage when Gerard, dust-stained and

weary, appeared at the bend of the road opening upon the pasture land. His features were pinched, his eyes hollow, and his face wore an anxious, sorrowful expression. For four long days he had waited at Grange-Allard for the letter promised by Helene. He could not sleep nor eat, and every day he wended his way despairingly to the edge of the forest; every moment he was on the point of violating his promise to the young girl, and of hastening to Juvigny. But the fear of increasing her trials, and the wrong he had already done her, kept him sad and solitary on the skirts of the woods from whence he returned each day, bitterly disappointed, to Grange-Allard.

Finally, on the morning of the fifth day, he could endure it no longer, and leaving the farm, he arrived at Juvigny worn out and feverish. He walked over the pasture and turned into the Rue du Tribel, reaching the gate just as his father was returning from the parsonage.

The eyes of M. de Seigneulles flashed fire at the sight of the culprit, and he was about to give vent to his wrath on the street. He managed, however, to control himself until the house-door had closed behind them.

"Come to my room, right away," said the enraged old gentleman; "I have to speak to you,"

and he pointed at the door of the vestibule, while Gerard stood before him with his head uncovered.

The tone in which this command was given left no doubt as to the state of the father's mind. Gerard read in the angry lights of those piercing gray eyes the presage of a grand rage.

"Well," thought he, while climbing the steps, "he has heard the story of Fond d'Enfer; so much the better. I shall not have the trouble of relating it myself; that clears the way."

They arrived on the landing of the first floor where the window opened upon the gardens. Gerard threw a furtive glance in that direction, seeking to get a glimpse of Helene, which would strengthen his courage, but M. de Seigneulles did not give him time. With an imperious gesture, he pushed his son into the room.

"Sir," he said, closing the door violently behind them, "look me in the face and answer me frankly once in your life. Do you know the story that is going the rounds in this town?"

"Yes, sir," replied Gerard, convinced that his father alluded to the adventure of Fond d'Enfer.

"Then it is true—you confess it!" cried M. de Seigneulles violently.

"I confess it," replied Gerard.

His father remained silent for a moment; the self-possession of his son confounded him.

"Shameful!" thought he, "and he dares to acknowledge it; in what an epoch we are living! Just Heaven!"

"You should have buried yourself a hundred feet beneath the sod, rather than to commit such villainy!" he continued.

"That word is a little too strong," said Gerard, to whose lips the paternal exaggeration brought a smile.

"Sangrebleu!" said M. de Seigneulles, indignantly; "have you the front to laugh! I have said villainy, and I maintain the word; it is not any too strong for the deed."

"There is nothing villainous or even extraordinary in what I have done. You have been young, sir, and you would probably have acted in the same way."

"Never!" replied the Chevalier dumfounded. "Are you a man of honor, sir?"

"I believe so."

"I am beginning to doubt it myself. Now, as matters stand, what do you expect to do?"

"I have come to ask you," replied Gerard with deference.

"To ask me!" exclaimed M. de Seigneulles. "Have you then no blood in your veins? You should have taken my advice before this thing happened. You say that I would have acted as you have done—do you believe then that if I should have been guilty of such a deed, I would have sought advice as to how I should act? I would have saddled my horse and gone to seek that young girl whom you have allowed to depart after having shamefully compromised her?"

"Helene gone!" stammered Gerard.

"Are you then ignorant of it?" continued the Chevalier, pacing the floor. "Could she have remained here after what had passed? Ah, well! Where are you going?" he added as he saw Gerard advancing towards the door.

"I am going to do what you have reproached me for not doing sooner!" replied the young man, who had become pale with excitement; "I am going to find her."

"Remain here!" said M. de Seigneulles imperiously, grasping him by the arm.

"Permit me to go, sir."

"I forbid it. You have acted foolishly enough already, and it is now for me to act as I think proper."

Gerard irritated at this resistance made a vio-

lent effort to reach the door. The old man had become furious, and his son was chafing like a wild horse under the spur, so that between them there began a silent struggle which threatened to become serious. They were no longer father and son, but two men blinded with rage. Happily the ancient guardsman still had a strong arm; he found once more the vigor of other days and ended by throwing Gerard upon the sofa. Then releasing him suddenly, with a vivacity astonishing at his age, the Chevalier made a bound forward, opened the door, rushed out, turning the key behind him and locking his son within.

XVII

For some time Gerard remained exhausted and panting upon the sofa. The reproaches and anathemas of M. de Seigneulles still resounded in his ears. All that had passed in that quarter of an hour affected him as a nightmare. He could hear vaguely the pawing of Bruno in the court-yard, the angry voice of his father and the replies of the frightened Manette.

"Bring me my large valise," cried the Chevalier.

"Your large valise!" repeated Manette. "Holy Mary! it has been ten years since you used it; are you in your senses, Monsieur?"

The Chevalier made no answer but stamped his foot impatiently.

Finally, after a noisy disturbance, and a great many exclamations, the valise was buckled to the crupper of the saddle. Gerard approached the window and saw his father get astride the

horse and give the animal a vigorous blow of the whip. Bruno's hoofs were soon clattering over the stones of the Rue du Tribel.

Raising his eyes, Gerard observed Marius in the neighboring garden, smoking under the elm-trees on the terrace.

"Ah!" thought he, "I can go now and have an explanation "

Without trying to open the door he jumped over the window-sill and let himself fall into the court-yard two feet from the astounded Baptiste. In a few moments he had joined Marius under the garden trees.

"Welcome," exclaimed that young man, extending his hand to him, "I knew that you would come to the rescue."

"And Helene?" said Gerard.

"Gone," replied Marius with a sigh; "this place was not a residence for her after the scene at Fond d'Enfer. Ah! my friend, I have done you a great wrong." And putting aside all false shame, the poet confessed frankly his foolish conduct at the hunting breakfast and its disastrous consequences.

"Helene," he added, "has fled before the hatred of Madame Grandfief, but I have not given up the fight and I shall serve to that detestable prude a dish of my own making."

Gerard insisted so passionately upon knowing the residence of Helene, that Marius ended by giving him the name of the street and the number of the house where his sister had taken refuge.

"Thanks!" cried Gerard; "I shall leave for Paris as soon as possible; will you not accompany me?"

"No, not now. I am nursing my wrath and I do not wish it to cool down. But my poor friend, what do you hope to do there?"

"I wish to see Helene," answered Gerard in a resolute tone, "to prove to her that my heart is unchanged, and to bring her back here as my wife."

His eyes flashed, and his whole countenance had an expression of energy that was not habitual to him. Marius looked at him a moment in surprise, then slapping him vigorously on the shoulder, he exclaimed:

"Do you know that I admire you, old fellow—you are a man! Depart, and good luck to you. Go to the Hotel du Parnasse; the proprietor is a good fellow, but do not say that I recommended you, or he might show you the door."

Meanwhile, M. de Seigneulles was jogging along the road to the station. In his impatience, he thought that the mile-stones would never end, and he almost spurred the blood out of the faith-

ful Bruno, who did not understand that reckless mode of traveling. In spite of his aversion to railroads and all modern inventions, the Chevalier heartily wished himself seated on the train rolling in the direction of Paris.

"At this moment," he said to himself, "there are people in the world who have the right to accuse the Seigneulles of a disloyal act. The family escutcheon bears now on its field of azure, hitherto immaculate, an ignominious black stain."

That thought made the blood mount to his brow. He felt that he could not rest till that stain was effaced. How he was to wipe out that blemish he did not yet know, and he hardly dared to dwell upon a point so delicate.

"First of all," he said, in bemoaning the necessity of repairing the folly of his son, "it is necessary for me to see that confounded girl. What kind of a creature I'll find, God only knows. An adventuress, no doubt, with beguiling looks and bewitching effrontery. If Gerard had only wronged some poor timid girl; but no, he must needs stumble upon one of those Parisian sirens, without principle and without education. Sangrebleu!"

He cordially detested Helene for coming to

Juvigny to overthrow his plans and spoil the future of his son. At the same time by a strange contradiction, he could not think of that eighteen-year-old girl betrayed by Gerard, without overflowing indignation. The aristocratic pride, the sentiments of honor, and the paternal egotism fought, in that loyal soul, a formidable combat.

"I will never be easy until I see her," he cried as he journeyed onward through the fields. "Miserable causeway, it is interminable!"

Little by little the distance diminished however, and ere long M. de Seigneulles perceived the roofs of the houses at the station and heard the puffing of the locomotive. He thought that the train was starting without him; so spurring his horse, he trotted at a rapid gait down a steep hill. Unfortunately the strength of Bruno was not equal to the haughty impatience of his master; the poor beast stumbled and fell, and the impetuous old gentleman was thrown upon a pile of stones. Some peasants laboring in a neighboring field ran to his rescue. They lifted him from the ground and found that besides having a bruised head, he was unable to stand on his legs. The village was near at hand, and they carried the wounded Chevalier to the inn there,

followed by his lame horse; then they started in search of a physician.

M. de Seigneulles was suffering greatly with his leg, but his bodily pains were nothing in comparison to the mental and moral irritation he underwent as he thought of the delay caused by this unhappy fall. The doctor arrived, and after thoroughly examining the sick man, pronounced that there were no fractures. Still the leg was greatly bruised and displayed to the eye considerable swelling. "But that is nothing," said he, "drink arnica, apply ten leeches to the knee, and all will be well."

"Can I leave to-morrow?" inquired M. de Seigneulles anxiously.

"Not a step can I allow you to-morrow. In four days, if you are careful. Ten leeches, do you understand?"

"Four days!" exclaimed the Chevalier as the doctor left the room; "it is preposterous! This old saw-bones wishes to kill me!" And sitting up in his bed he ordered them to bring him at once forty leeches.

"Pardon, Monsieur," said the inn-keeper, "but the doctor said ten leeches.

"The doctor is an ass!" replied M. de Seigneulles. "Obey me!"

When the leeches were brought, the Chevalier dismissed everybody, and then began to apply successively the whole forty leeches about his knee. As a born soldier, M. de Seigneulles believed only in horse remedies, and he reasoned with himself thus: "If ten leeches will cure me in four days, I can be on foot to-morrow by quadrupling the dose." He called this "energetic doctoring." Very energetic indeed for at the expiration of three hours, losing such a quantity of blood, he became whiter than the bedclothes, and feeling himself fainting, he had only time to call for aid.

The doctor was called in haste, and on being informed of the action of his patient, he exclaimed loudly:

"You are in a pretty fix! Now you are here for fifteen days!"

M. de Seigneulles, at any other time, would have vigorously resented the insolence of this Esculapius, but he was just then too weak to be indignant.

He contented himself with heaving a melancholy sigh, and buried his head despairingly beneath the bedclothes.

XVIII

While Gerard's father was detained at the inn at Blesmes, Marius Laheyward, at Juvigny, was thinking more and more of wreaking vengeance on Madame Grandfief. The intolerant insolence of this malicious woman, who posed as the great justice distributor in the town of Juvigny, had always irritated the nerves of the poet; but above all else, he could not pardon her for her conspiracy in the Fond d'Enfer episode, and for the flight of Helene. Every morning he awoke, swearing that he would never leave the country till he had lowered her pride and arrogance. In the meantime, to make himself disagreeable to her, he began to court her daughter, Georgette.

Since Mlle. Grandfief accepted from him an original sonnet on the evening of the ball at Salvanches, Marius had discovered that this sly young person looked upon him favorably. It may

not be that she properly appreciated his quatrains and bizarre triolets, but a girl always peruses with pleasure the verses which she herself has inspired. Georgette had cherished the lines presented to her by young Laheyraud, and read and reread them secretly, although not fully comprehending them. The joyous Marius was just the lover to please this ingenuous young lady.

A fearless, graceful dancer, a *bon vivant* in every sense of the word; with his ruddy face, blonde beard, bold eyes and eloquent tongue, he was to Georgette singularly attractive and irresistible. Girls strictly reared are always the ones who have a taste for the *mauvais sujets*, and Mlle. Grandfief found the love of Marius savory, as all forbidden fruit. She met him often in her walks, and he had become a regular attendant at high-mass at Saint-Etienne. Seated not far from her pew he flashed upon her burning glances that became to her a guilty, but delicious distraction.

Since the famous breakfast, Marius had not put his foot into the Grandfief house, but in the evenings when the moon shone, Georgette, seated at the window of her chamber, could see him roaming around the inclosure of Salvanches, and the innocent creature already pictured him scal-

ing the walls and climbing to her balcony on a rope ladder. She would retire to rest uneasily, arising from her bed frequently to run to the window in her bare feet, to see if he was still there standing under some plane-tree of the silent promenade. By degrees, Marius himself came to enjoy this clandestine courtship, begun in *bravado* and continued for the mere purpose of vexing Madame Grandfief. The appetizing beauty of the little *provinciale*, with her cheeks like ripe peaches, her black eyes hypocritically lowered, and her luscious, rosy lips, was very seductive to this robust fellow whose Rabelaisian tastes contrasted strangely with the funereal sentiments of his poems. Insensibly his imagination became inflamed, and his heart affected; in short, that which in the first place was only a passing fancy, became, not a *grande passion*—Marius was not formed for such a sentiment—but a lively and serious caprice.

The vintage season arrived. This is the time of year when the landscape at Juvigny, ordinarily too green or too gray, suddenly takes on the most intense and varied colors, and a magnificence absolutely meridional. In the woods, the lote trees crimsoned; the beech changed to a reddish brown, and the foliage of the oak was bright

with every tint of tan and gold. In the distance, stretched out the forest of Juré, enveloped in purple and violet shadows, but after all, it was the vineyards that presented to the eye the loveliest feast of brilliant and artistic coloring. Over those gentle slopes, the autumn threw a mantle that brought to mind the gorgeous richness of Oriental fabrics. The vine branches, loaded with fruit, displayed every tint of red and yellow, splendid crimsons, pale green, russet golden, and rose color—all mingling harmoniously and singing a magic symphony. Below, the silvery willows, and above, the snowy vapors on the horizon, contrasted sweetly with the intense coloring of the woods and vineyards—all spreading serenely there under the azure skies.

At this season, the whole of Juvigny is full of gayety. Grapes are the chief product of the soil, and when there is an abundant harvest each proprietor brings from the depths of his cellar several bottles of old wine and opens them in honor of the new vintage. At daybreak, the vine-dressers and their wives and daughters go singing along the streets in merry bands. The roads are plowed up by the carts, loaded with grapes; the wine-press houses throw open their wide cart-entrances and expose to view, within their dark

recesses, the enormous proportion of the vats, and the plump paunches of the casks ranged along the wall.

Toward noon, the ladies and the young girls roam through the vineyards and mingle with the vine-dressers. They bring their lunches and eat in the open air on the edge of the meadow; then, like good subjects of Grandgousier, they repair to the plantation of willows, and there under the trees they dance a rondeau—" *Tant baudent que c'est passe-temps céleste les voir ainsi soy rigoller.*" And on every side the echoes take up the merry song.

At dusk they return to the town with the last carts, and the day is ended with a grand supper where wine flows freely and all is merriment, the pleasant winy odors from the presses making the air balmy and increasing this easy familiarity and sociability.

Marius Laheyward did not fail to be present at these provincial love-feasts, inasmuch as he wished to meet Mlle. Grandfief there. The god of lovers was evidently propitious, for, one beautiful afternoon, he recognized Georgette among the young daughters of the owners of the vineyard, who were gathering grapes themselves, mixing with the laborers. As chance would have it, Georgette

had come alone, Madame Grandfief being kept at home with a headache had consented to trust her daughter in a friend's charge. This was for the poet a precious windfall, and he profited by it, as you may well believe. The two plucked the grapes, side by side, eating from the same bunch and lunching from the same plate, taking advantage of this charming familiarity to touch each other's hands. That evening, when they returned to the town, the proprietor of the vineyard invited Marius to supper, and in honor of the ladies opened several bottles of champagne. Georgette, who did not disdain to dip her pretty lips into the sparkling wine, drank freely, as did the poet, and when they arose from the table their brains were excited, their eyes brilliant and their tongues loosened.

The waiting-maid from Salvanches had come for Georgette, so she must return home. She went to the dressing-room to get her mantle, and under cover of the general confusion, Marius, very gay indeed and hardly conscious of what he was doing, slipped from the dining-room in search of the young girl. He was roaming about the corridor in the dim light, when he saw Georgette descending the stairway coming towards him. She tripped lightly down the steps

humming a waltz, holding her straw hat in her hand. Never had she appeared so lovely to Marius; her hair coquettishly disordered; her nose in the air; her cheeks glowing, and her lips smiling. Her great eyes were all aglow, and as she breathed, her youthful bosom rose and fell sweetly. If Marius was still under the influence of champagne, Georgette herself was affected by the walk in the cool twilight, the slight exhilaration caused by grapes eaten from the bunch and the gayety of the supper. She was fresh-looking and engaging; the stairway was so solitary that Marius felt himself possessed by an amorous demon, and without speaking he seized Georgette's two hands within his own, and pressed a burning kiss upon her rosy lips. She was so dazed at first, that either from terror or embarrassment, or because she found that impertinent kiss not altogether unpleasant, she stood there motionless; and Marius—poets are always self-conceited—felt that she did not withdraw her lips very quickly from his own. Suddenly she uttered a little startled cry; a door opened and Reine Lecomte, who had been among the grape-gatherers of the day, stood upon the threshold. Mlle. Grandfief released herself with an air of indignation and fled covered with blushes, while Marius, with that

aplomb that comes from semi-intoxication, descended the stairway delighted with the adventure, smacking his lips in memory of that kiss, and murmuring with satisfaction: "Fooled, Madame Grandfief."

Georgette returned to Salvanches confused and thoughtful. She experienced a strange sensation of uneasiness; a mixture of fear and pleasure; of anguish and delight. When the lips of Marius touched her own, there coursed in her veins alternately fire and ice; her heart had throbbed deliciously, and she confessed to herself blushing that she had wished that kiss might be prolonged for hours. But, ere long a terrible fear filled her devout and guileless soul. Helene Laheyraud, so cruelly punished, perhaps had not committed a graver offense than her own. That kiss that had left behind it such a sweet feverish sensation might draw upon her head the same dire consequences as upon the daughter of the Inspector. This singular fear made her shudder from head to foot, and she could think of nothing else. When she found herself alone in her little room the fear redoubled. Catching a glimpse of her face in the mirror she was startled at the brilliancy of her eyes. Undoubtedly something new and terrible was taking place within her; she had a fever, yet she shivered.

"Ah, Mon Dieu!", she exclaimed, "What has become of me? and that gossiping tongue of Reine who saw it all, and who is sure to spread it abroad! By to-morrow I shall be the talk of the town." She sobbed herself to sleep, and dreamed all night of Helene Laheyrd.

On rising the next morning, she ran to the mirror and seeing the dark circles under her eyes, her dejected countenance and her pale lips, she could doubt it no longer: she was lost beyond rescue. How could she dare face the inquisitorial gaze of her mother? It was necessary to show herself however, and at the breakfast hour she descended pale and trembling.

Happily Madame Grandfief, in the excitement of the quarterly laundry-day, did not notice the altered looks of her daughter. During the forenoon Georgette remained silent and anxious. Every time she passed before the mirror she observed with horror the pallor of her face, and her fears increased. Her agitation and melancholy did not escape the notice of the Abbé Valland, who paid a visit to Salvanches in the afternoon. He had known Georgette from her infancy, and still treated her as a little child. He was very observant, and was struck by the change in her countenance, which was usually unruffled and passive.

He imagined that she was regretting the broken engagement with Gerard, and that she was more mortified and disappointed than she wished to own. He straightway resolved to have a talk on the subject with the young girl.

On taking leave of Madame Grandfief, he said: "Apropos of Georgette, I wish to speak to her about the altar-cloth which the young girls are embroidering for the chapel of the Virgin; send her to me to-morrow at the parsonage, after the nine o'clock mass."

This invitation increased Georgette's anxiety. Without a doubt the Curé already knew of the episode, and the idea of an interrogatory made her tremble. The next morning, after a restless night, she started for the parsonage. She was so frightened that she could hardly lift the heavy knocker. The Abbé was awaiting the young girl in the library, and as she entered he dismissed his old housekeeper, and with the skill of an examining magistrate, he placed her chair so that the light would fall upon her face. Then taking her hand, he made her sit before him.

"Well, my child," he began, "what is the news at Salvanches?"

"Nothing, sir; mamma is assorting the clothes and papa is out hunting."

"And what of yourself? They tell me you have been ill lately. You certainly do look thin."

Georgette trembled and turned very pale.

"Me?" she replied, lowering her eyes under the piercing gaze of the Abbé. "There is nothing the matter with me, I assure you."

"Then, why that downcast countenance?" said the Abbé, examining her anew over his spectacles. "You have lost your color, and one does not wear an expression like that without a cause. My dear child, do not dissemble with me; you well know that I am not severe like your mother. Tell me all your little troubles; do not fear to confide in me."

"Ah, Monsieur le Curé," she exclaimed, her eyes downcast and twisting her fingers nervously, "I dare not."

"Are they then such great troubles?" asked the Abbé with an encouraging smile.

"It is impossible for me to tell you," murmured Georgette. Then as if overcome by fear and remorse she stammered out: "O, Monsieur le Curé, I have committed a grievous fault."

"A grievous fault," repeated the Abbé, a little perplexed. Then seeing the consternation depicted on the countenance of Mlle. Grandfief, he



Anger

said in a grave voice: "Do you wish me to hear you in confession?"

"Oh!" she cried in tragic tones, "that is needless, for I shall have to inform my mother of my situation."

The Abbé started and pushed his chair backwards.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "tell me what is agitating you? What have you done?"

"I believe," said the poor child, "that I am no better than Helene Laheyrd."

She covered her face with her hands. Abbé Valland, frightened beyond expression, stood up.

"What are you telling me!" he exclaimed. "But go on, my child, explain yourself clearly. Who has brought this to pass? Faults of this nature are not committed by thinking, neither by wishing. One does not offend in that way—alone."

He wiped his brow, for that delicate investigation had made the perspiration roll down his face in great drops.

"I was not alone," replied Georgette; then bursting into tears, and becoming suddenly more confiding she said: "Alas! Monsieur, I am lost!"

"Holy Virgin!" cried the poor Curé wringing

his hands, "who is the scape-grace, criminal enough for—?"

"Marius Laheyraud."

"Marius! Again! it seems as if there is a fatality about that family. Well then, unhappy child, tell me all; it is no longer wise to conceal anything. Where did it happen?"

"Upon the stairway at M. Corrard's," sobbed Georgette.

"Upon the stairway! Shameless impudence!" exclaimed the horrified Abbé. "When! How! Speak!"

Gradually he gained her childish confidence; she avowed all, trembling like a leaf: the insidious courtship in which she had encouraged Marius; the afternoon in the vineyard; the slight intoxication at supper, and then, finally, the kiss upon her lips, and the pleasure it gave her.

"And then?" groaned the indignant Abbé.

"That is all," murmured Georgette, drowned in tears.

The Curé drew a long breath of profound relief.

"You have told me the whole truth?"

"Alas! yes, Monsieur."

Notwithstanding the terror he had just expe-

rienced, the Abbé Valland could not repress a smile. That ultra-naïve simplicity amazed him. He remained silent, contemplating the sleeve of his cassock. At last he turned toward Georgette who waited, confused and tearful.

"My dear child," he said gravely, "dry your tears and be reassured. Providence is merciful, and the consequences you dread will not happen—this time. Only be on your guard, for I cannot answer for what will follow if the offense is repeated."

He rose from his chair and walked up and down the floor to conceal his desire to laugh, while Georgette wiped her cheeks and became a little more calm.

"This affair," said he, after having addressed to her a vigorous lecture, "is no less deeply to be regretted. I hope that scapegrace Marius may guard the secret of his pranks. I will speak to him of it, and God be praised, we can avoid this new scandal!"

"But," said Georgette humbly, "there is someone who saw us," and she told him of the sudden apparition of Reine Lecomte.

"A pest upon her!" exclaimed the Abbé, who could hardly refrain from using an oath, "that spoils it all! That girl has the tongue of a

viper, and she has without a doubt already told the whole story and it now obliges me to consult your mother."

At the mention of her mother's name, Georgette began to weep anew in a way that touched the heart of the old Curé.

"Well, well," he said, endeavoring to pacify her, "do not despair; I will assume the responsibility of the whole matter and see that you are not scolded."

That same day, he went to Salvanches, took Madame Grandfief aside and related to her the whole affair.

As soon as she heard his first words, she burst forth into a violent rage against Marius, and vowed that she would denounce his insolence in court.

"Be calm, Madame," said the Abbé gently, "for Georgette's sake it is necessary to avoid giving unnecessary publicity to this unfortunate incident; unhappily, secrecy is no longer possible as there was a witness to the scene. Reine Lecomte, the little seamstress, saw it all."

This revelation only increased the wrath of Madame Grandfief.

"You see," she said, "there is all the more reason for me to seek public vindication for the

insulting conduct of this scamp, and to proclaim abroad the innocence of Georgette."

"Permit me to suggest, my dear Madame," replied Abbé Valland, "to look first at this thing in the right light. M. Laheyrard is assuredly very guilty, but Georgette has also some peccadilloes with which to reproach herself. She has confessed to me that she did nothing to discourage the young man's attentions, on the contrary—"

"It is impossible," protested Madame Grandfief. "My daughter has been too carefully trained."

The Abbé shook his head, and repeated all that the young girl had confessed to him. Madame Grandfief was too astounded to speak.

"This is too much!" she said, after a long silence. "A daughter in whom I have inculcated only the highest principles! I will be the laughing stock of the town. What must I do?"

"There is always some way in which to remedy an evil," hazarded the Abbé. "Georgette loves Marius Laheyrard; let them marry."

Madame Grandfief bounded up, all of her pride in revolt, and uttered a cry of rage.

"Never!" she exclaimed. "My daughter to enter such a family after the scandalous behavior of Mlle. Laheyrard! I should die of shame."

"Ah, Madame, who knows that Helene is guilty? After what has happened you should be more indulgent. Georgette is innocent, and yet before to-morrow she may be attacked by the same absurd calumnies that drove my poor godchild away. Believe me, it will be better to face the matter bravely, and hush it all up by a wedding."

"I would sooner shut my daughter in a convent," retorted the inflexible matron, suddenly turning all of her wrath upon Georgette. "She is an unnatural child, and you may trust me to meet her with an appropriate punishment."

"She has been punished sufficiently already," replied the Curé; "it would be better to avoid a scandal, and act like a prudent mother—"

"A marriage under these conditions! when my daughter has refused superb offers! No, it is impossible!"

"Very well," said the Abbé, taking his hat and bowing; "reflect upon my suggestion; weigh the *pros* and *cons*; I shall return to you to-morrow."

XIX

While these things were taking place at Salvanches, M. de Seigneulles had recovered from the indisposition caused by his indiscreet application of the forty leeches. As soon as he was restored, he entered the first train to Paris, not being deterred in the least by a very stormy night. On reaching Paris, he installed himself at an antique hotel on the Rue St. Dominique where he had often lodged during the Restoration. The next morning, putting on his broad-brimmed hat and enveloping himself in his long overcoat, he directed his footsteps toward the boarding-school wherein Helene had taken refuge.

The establishment of Madame Le Mancel was situated in that lonely part of the Rue de Vaugirard that adjoins the Boulevard Montparnasse. The Chevalier had not taken thirty steps along the street of that deserted quarter when he stopped suddenly with a gesture of violent sur-

prise. He shaded his eyes with his hand, then uttered an energetic oath when on a closer inspection of the early promenader, whose face was partly concealed by the upturned collar of his overcoat, he found that he was no other than Gerard. The young man was leaning against a wall contemplating with an air of melancholy a high gate painted green, above which one could read: "*Institution of Madame Le Mancel, founded in 1838.*"

Behind this gate in the court-yard two plane trees waved their half-naked boughs, through which one could see a row of buildings with closed shutters.

"Sangrebleu!" cried the Chevalier, shaking the dreamer by the shoulder; "I always find you where you ought not to be!"

Gerard, aroused so suddenly from his absorbing contemplations, trembled on recognizing M. de Seigneulles. He quickly recovered his self-possession.

"Father—

"What pranks have you come to play here, sir?" interrupted the old Chevalier impetuously.

"I came to repair my wrong."

"Then you have seen the young woman?"

"No," replied Gerard sadly, "during the eight days of my sojourn here she has been ill, and I



have not been able to get a glimpse of her. She is better to day, but they refuse to allow me to enter."

"They have good reasons to do so, and your persistence is very unbecoming. It is for me to see Mlle. Laheyward," said M. de Seigneulles, lifting the knocker of the green gate."

"Permit me to enter with you," said Gerard in an entreating voice.

"Certainly not!"

The gate was partly opened; Gerard seized his father by the arm.

"Father," he said, "you are going to see Helene; be good to her; do not make me desperate."

"By the pope's shoe! Are you giving me lessons in manners? Attend to your own affairs; or better still, return home." The Chevalier spoke as if the Rue du Tribel was only around the corner from the Rue de Vaugirard. "Or rather," he added after a moment's hesitation, "wait for me here."

He entered the court; the great gate closed behind him. He had prepared a card upon which was written: "The Chevalier de Seigneulles wishes to have an interview with Mlle. Laheyward." He charged the janitress to deliver this to the young girl, and in a few moments he was

ushered into a small apartment where Helene was at work. An étagère filled with books, several wicker chairs and a table upon which a rose bloomed in a glass of water composed the furniture of this room, into which the Chevalier made his stately entrance, his head erect in his white cravat, his eyebrows contracted, and his lips compressed.

Helene, still agitated by the announcement of this unexpected visitor, stood near the table. Her beautiful blonde hair, whose lovely disorder had so scandalized M. de Seigneulles in the past, was now tied back with a blue ribbon which set off discreetly her pale face.

"Mademoiselle," he said brusquely, "I am M. de Seigneulles."

Helene bowed. "I have never been easy in my conscience about you," he continued, "although in this unfortunate affair you have been most to blame—"

"Monsieur," she cried, interrupting him with vivacity, "you are cruel. Have I not punished myself sufficiently already, by separating myself from those I love? You should spare me these reproaches, even though merited."

The Chevalier felt surprised; Helene's charming voice touched him, in spite of himself, and

softened in a strange fashion the fibers of a heart as resisting as an old oak. He could not refrain from admiring the simple, dignified attitude of this young girl. He had expected giddy airs and tearful recriminations; and he was astonished at her manner, so proud, and yet at the same time so resigned.

"Let me finish," he said. "You did not understand me. Your personal conduct does not concern me, but it is my duty to be concerned about my son and to repair his folly. I am a gentleman and I owe it to the honor of my family."

"Pardon me, Monsieur," said Helene, "but I do not understand you fully."

"I will express myself clearly," replied the Chevalier, impatient at Mlle. Laheyrd's want of perspicuity, adding bluntly: "My son has done you a wrong and we owe you compensation."

"Compensation!" said Helene looking at him in amazement.

"Yes," he continued, "as hard as it may be to make the sacrifice, we are in the habit of paying our debts without contending about the amount."

This time the young girl trembled, believing that M. de Seigneulles had conceived the idea of offering her pecuniary compensation as the price

of her absence from Juvigny. The blood mounted to her cheeks and with that promptness of speech that was habitual with her, she answered indignantly:

"Have I heard you aright? What do those words *debt* and *payment* signify? Have you come to me to set a price—"

These last words awakened in him all of his prejudices. He had for Parisians the mistrust of the provincial who always fears being cheated. The native suspicion and finesse of the Lorraine born now got the best of him. He thought he had perhaps to deal with one of those crafty persons who would force him to bid high for her resistance, and he resolved to try Helene. He scrutinized her closely with his keen gray eyes. "And what will that be?" he said boldly.

"It would be for me the greatest of insults!"

"Then you refuse my offers whatever they may be?"

"Yes, assuredly," said Helene with emphasis, "You must indeed think wretchedly of me! I am not noble by birth, but my heart is as honorable as yours. Not another word, sir; I will retire."

She took several steps towards the door. The Chevalier was greatly confused, but inward-

ly delighted; he gazed at her with increasing benevolence.

"Sangrebleu!" he muttered, "you shall not for all that prevent me from repairing my son's offense."

"One is not offended with people for being loved," she answered with a sad smile, "and the wrongs of which you speak are imaginary."

"Imaginary? Hardly that, since he has forced you to leave Juvigny."

"My departure was planned months ago, and I have only left a few weeks sooner than I expected."

"But you—you are compromised!"

"In the eyes of some people who hate me, perhaps; but in my eyes, and in the eyes of those who love me, not in the least. And why should I be? Because I have loved some one honestly, and because I have gone away to keep from being a source of trouble to those I love? No, sir, my conscience is clear and my honor is intact."

"Pardon me," said the Chevalier, "but that is not what is said by your best friends."

"And what do they say?" cried Helene in astonishment.

"They pretend—" he began, "but the thing is not easily explained." He hesitated, looking for

a moment at the charming face of the young girl, her intelligent brow; her clear honest eyes; her *spirituelle* mouth, whose firm, fresh lips seemed never to have spoken a lie. The poor old Chevalier became more and more embarrassed.

"Pardon me," he continued in a more gentle voice, "if I dwell upon this delicate subject, but I came here to speak frankly. They are convinced at Juvigny that my son—I blush in speaking it to you—that Gerard has wronged you gravely, that if you have left the town it was to conceal—"

As he spoke Helene's eyes opened wider and wider. She blushed at first, then suddenly grew very pale, and her white lips quivered. She could not articulate a word, but made a gesture entreating him to be silent; then she sat down in a chair and leaned against the table, her countenance downcast and her eyes blankly staring before her.

"Me! Me!" she murmured.

M. de Seigneulles gazed at her with anxiety and began to regret that he had spoken so roughly.

The ancient guardsman was more at his ease facing the barricade, in 1830, than in the presence of this young girl bowed down in her mute grief.

There was so much sincerity in her voice, such an expression of brave honesty in all of her features that he was ashamed to have believed so readily the gossips of Juvigny.

"Mademoiselle," he said meekly.

Helene continued to sob. "O my father, my poor father!" she cried. At the thought of the despair of M. Laheyward when these calumnies reached his ears, her own grief became uncontrollable. It was the unaffected, inordinate grief of a child—a storm of tears that never seemed to stop.

M. de Seigneulles was profoundly moved by this scene of desolation. Remembering the afternoon when he had witnessed the tenderness of the young girl for her father, he recalled how touching was that affection, and understood the terrible anguish in Helene's cry.

"Her first thought was of her father," he thought, "surely I have misjudged her."

He approached her with a repentant, respectful mien, and at that moment her blonde head yielded to the weight of that heavy affliction and she fell forward on the table. M. de Seigneulles believed that she had fainted; at a loss for what to do, becoming more and more excited and nervous, he knelt on the floor before her and with

the tender precaution of a father for a sick child he imprinted a kiss upon her hand.

"Pardon me," she said through her tears, "but this has been too much for me; the blow was so violent and unexpected—I thought of my father's agony when he heard these malicious reports. How thoughtless I must have been that they should imagine such a thing! I beg of you not to believe that I am guilty. Your son's love for me has always been as respectful as it was devoted. I swear it to you, and he himself will affirm it. Why has he not already told you?"

"Why?" stammered the confused Chevalier. "It is because I have not allowed him to speak; I have treated him like a milk-sop. "But," he continued earnestly, "his word is needless. I believe you, Mademoiselle, and kneeling at your feet I ask you to pardon me."

Helene wiped the tears from her eyes, and perceiving that he was on his knees before her, she held out her hand to assist him to arise.

"You owe me no apologies, M. de Seigneulles; it is I who should demand your forgiveness, for having so thoughtlessly disturbed your peace of mind, by my foolish behavior. You must be indulgent with me, for I have been badly brought up. Since we came to live at Juvigny, I have



been permitted to do as I chose; my mother scarcely noticed me, and my father"—she smiled sadly—"was never like other fathers. He spoiled me terribly."

"But you loved him," sighed M. de Seigneulles.

"Oh! yes, and here my greatest sorrow, every day, is that I am no longer able to embrace him as in the past."

"Have patience," he said gently, "you will be recompensed on your return."

Helene shook her head sadly.

"I will never return to Juvigny," she said resolutely.

"You must not say that. I will force you to return."

"You, Monsieur!" she cried in amazement.

"I? certainly. Do you think that I would have been jolted about for eight hours on that miserable train just to make you weep? Do you not understand why I am here?"

Gradually Helene's face brightened. "But, Monsieur," she stammered, "I believe—I do not know—"

"You no longer love my son!"

She blushed, and her lips moved, but she was unable to utter a word.

"Do not answer me," exclaimed the Chevalier impetuously. "Wait until I return."

He hastened from the room; descended the stairway four steps at a time, and ran to find Gerard who was awaiting him, a prey to all the terrors of imagination and expectation.

"Follow me!" said M. de Seigneulles with an imperious air.

They lightly remounted the stairway, to the great amazement and amusement of the pupils of Madame Le Mancel's institution, who were watching them with curiosity. When they entered the little room where Helene stood trembling and expectant, asking herself if she were dreaming, the Chevalier made her a profound bow.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "I have the honor to demand your hand in marriage for my son, Gerard de Seigneulles;" then turning towards his son, "Go, Gerard, and kiss the hand of your betrothed."

There was a cry, a double cry of joy in the little room of the school, as Gerard grasped Helene's hands and covered them with kisses. The sun itself had his share in the festivities; the October mist was rent by a bright ray that came through the curtains and rested upon the blonde

ringlets of the young girl, on the petals of the rose, and upon the head of Gerard, bending over her whom he loved. In one corner of the room sat the austere Chevalier, contemplating that love scene; and as he saw those caresses a strange huskiness rose in his throat. At last, tears rushed to his eyes, and, ashamed of his emotion, he tried to hide it with an oath; "Sangrebleu!" he growled.

This exclamation caused Helene to raise her head, and withdrawing her hands from Gerard's kisses, she made a rapid sign towards his father. He comprehended and ran to the old nobleman who pressed him to his heart; and for the first time an embrace of true affection united M. de Seigneulles and his son.

The excitement at Juvigny was great when the curious crowds who gathered in front of the Hotel Rose d'Or, awaiting the arrival of the omnibus from Blesmes, saw descending, one morning, Gerard, followed by Helene and the Chevalier. M. de Seigneulles, rejuvenated ten years, drew himself up proudly and offered his arm gallantly to Helene; while Gerard, whose radiant face revealed his happiness, walked by her side; and the three climbed lightly to the

upper town, by way of the clock-tower, while the shopkeepers standing in their doorways watched them pass.

The Chevalier's respectful manner and the smiling countenance of Gerard indicated clearly enough what would be the denouement of that adventure, but, if there were any skeptical minds that still had their doubts, the triumphant face of Madame Laheyrard was enough to dissipate them forever. The wife of the Inspector was prodigiously puffed up with pride, and gave vent to her joyous loquacity in hackneyed and noisy confidences. As is so frequent in small towns, a sudden revulsion of feeling took place, and the prejudices amassed against Helene gave way to indignant protestations at the public calumnies that had caused her such grief, each one affirming that from the first he or she had predicted a happy termination of Gerard's love. Even Magdelinet flattered himself that he had aided the blissful result. As happiness never comes singly, the marriage of Helene and Gerard achieved a triumph over the scruples of Madame Grandfief. She accepted her fate with a good grace, and agreed that Marius Laheyrard should marry Georgette; so the Abbé Valland had the



joy of blessing the two charming couples, one after the other.

After his marriage, the poetic varnish of Marius, which was only skin deep, scaled off rapidly; underneath appeared the bourgeois, and the author of the "Poems Orgiaques" became an honest Philistine, eating four meals a day, going to bed early, and sleeping admirably "without a dream of glory." Under the warm influence of the love of Helene and Gerard, the somber house of the Chevalier was soon metamorphosed, and M. de Seigneulles himself became young again, in heart, at least.

But the most surprising effect of these two joyous marriages was that they hastened a third one: that of Finoël. Out of spite, the hunchback suddenly decided to espouse Reine Lecomte. Henceforward, all went well with him; he was very happy and was blessed with many children.

THE END

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